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THREE OF THEM



MAXIM GORKY

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THREE OF THEM

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CHAPTER I

AMONG the forests of Kerjenz many lonely graves are scattered, in which lie mouldering the bones of men who held the ancient faith.* About one of these men—Antipe—many tales are still told in the villages of Kerjenz.

Antipe Luneff had been a rich, grasping peasant, who, after devoting himself for fifty years to worldly pleasures, fell to meditating deeply, became more and more melancholy, and at last deserting his family, retired into the forest. There, on the edge of a deep ravine, he built himself a hut in which he lived for eight years, summer and winter, allowing no one, not even friends nor relations, to come and see him. Sometimes people who had lost their way in the forest would stumble upon his hut and find Antipe kneeling on the threshold in prayer. He grew terrible to behold: withered and worn by fasting and prayer, and covered with hair like an animal. When he saw anyone, he would get up from his knees and silently bow down before him to the ground. If he were asked the way out of the forest, he would silently indicate the direction with his hand, bow again to the ground, and then, entering his hut, shut the door behind him. During these eight years many people saw him, but no one heard his voice. His wife and children used to come to him, bringing him food and clothing. Even

* Thus the raskolniki (dissenters) term their belief to distinguish it from the orthodox faith, it being founded on the corrected translation of the Scriptures made by Patriarch Nikon in 1666.

to them he only bowed silently to the ground, not once during the whole time of his penance ever saying one word to them.

He died in the year when the order was given for the destruction of all the hermitages, and it happened in the following way:—

When the ispravnik arrived with his men at the hut, they found Antipe kneeling in the middle of it, praying silently.

"Hullo, you!" called out the captain. "Clear out! We are going to break up your den!" But Antipe paid no attention to him. The captain shouted again and again, but never a word did the old man answer. Then the captain ordered his men to pull Antipe out of the hut by the hair of his head; but the men, seeing that the old man continued to pray earnestly, taking no notice of them, were awed by the strength of his faith and would not obey their chief. The ispravnik ordered them to pull down the hut, and they silently began to take off the roof, but carefully, so as not to hurt the old man.

The axes struck above Antipe's head, the boards cracked and fell to the ground, the sound of the blows echoing through the forest frightened the birds who flew round the hut, and the leaves trembled on the trees. But the old man continued to pray as if he neither saw nor heard anything. They began to pull the beams asunder, but the hermit still knelt on, motionless. Only when the last beams were thrown aside, and the captain came up and caught him by the hair, did Antipe, lifting up his eyes to the sky, murmur unto God,—

"All merciful Lord, forgive them," and fell backwards dead.

When this happened, Antipe's eldest son, Jacob, was twenty-three years old, and his youngest, Terence, was eighteen. Jacob, who was handsome and of great bodily strength, when only a lad had been nicknamed Jacob the reckless by the whole village, and at the time of his father's death was the biggest rake and squabbler in the whole district. Everyone complained

of him—his mother, the starosta,* his neighbours; he was arrested, locked up, and flogged with birches, but nothing could alter Jacob's wild nature, and it became more and more difficult for him to live in the village amongst the dissenters, who are quiet as moles, keep stubbornly to the ancient laws of their religion, and resent any innovations. Jacob smoked tobacco, drank vodka, wore clothes of German cut, never attended prayers and gatherings, and when sedate people used to admonish him he would answer with a sneer,—

"Wait a little, you venerable old people, everything must have its fill. When I have sinned enough I'll repent also. But now—it's too early. You need not talk to me about my father—he sinned fifty years and repented only eight. My sins are like down on a newly-hatched bird, but when they cover me like the feathers on a crow, then will be the time to repent."

"Heretic!" they used to call Jacob Luneff in the village, and as such he was hated and feared. About two years after his father's death Jacob married. He had spent in loose living all the money his father had scraped together by thirty years' hard labour, and had bequeathed to him, and nobody in his own village would give him his daughter in marriage. In a distant village he found a wife, a handsome orphan, and sold his father's beehives and two horses to pay for the wedding. His brother Terence, a shy and silent hunchback with long arms, did not interfere with him; his mother, who was ill and lay on the stove, would call out in an ominous and hoarse voice,—

"You cursed one! Have pity on your soul! Repent."

"Don't trouble, little mother!" Jacob would answer, "my father will intercede for me before God."

Jacob lived quietly and peacefully with his wife for about a year; he even did some work, but soon gave it up and again began to live loosely, disappearing from home sometimes for months together, and turning up at last beaten, tattered and hungry. Then Jacob's

* Starosta—head of the village.

mother died, and at her burial he beat and maimed the starosta, who was his long-standing enemy, and for this he was put in prison. When he was set free he reappeared in the village with a shaven head, sullen and embittered. The villagers hated him more and more, extending their distrust to his family, and especially to the inoffensive hunchback Terence, who since childhood had been the butt of all the girls and lads of the place. Jacob was called convict and cut-throat, while Terence was taunted with the epithets of monster and sorcerer. Terence remained silent through all the jeering and abuse, but Jacob threatened openly.

"All right! Just wait! I'll be even with you!"

He was forty when a fire broke out in the village, and was accused of arson and sent to Siberia.

On Terence's hands were left Jacob's wife, who went mad during the fire, and his son Ilia, ten years old, a strong, dark-haired boy, grave beyond his years. When this little fellow appeared in the street, all the children ran after him, throwing stones, while the grown-up people would say,—

"Oh! you little devil! Convict's offspring! May you come to an untimely end!"

Terence, who could not do hard work, had been a pedlar, and sold tar, cotton, needles and all sorts of trifles, but the fire, spreading over half the village, had destroyed Luneff's hut and all his goods, so that when it was over he found himself in the possession of only one horse and forty-three roubles in money. Seeing that he could not live any longer in the village, Terence gave his brother's wife over to the keeping of a poor woman for fifty copecks a month, bought an old cart, put his nephew into it, and decided to go to the nearest town, hoping to find there a distant relation, Petruha Filimonoff, the chief barman in an eating-house, who would help him.

Terence left his native village quietly in the night, like a thief. In silence he drove off, looking back every now and then with his great black eyes. His horse went at a walking pace, the cart jolted considerably, and Ilia, having buried himself in the hay, soon fell into

the deep slumbers of childhood. He was awakened in the middle of the night by a weird and strange sound, like the howl of a wolf. The night was fine, the cart had stopped at the edge of a forest, and the horse was eating the dewy grass at a little distance. A big fir tree, the top of which was broken, had grown out far into the field, and stood all alone, as if it had been expelled from the forest. The boy looked round uneasily for his uncle with his sharp eyes, while in the stillness of the night could be distinctly heard the dull sound of the horse's hoofs upon the ground, its heavy breathing, and the strange, doleful, trembling sound which was frightening Ilia.

"Uncle!" he called out softly.

"Yes?" answered Terence, hastily, and the howl suddenly ceased.

"Where are you?"

"Here. Don't worry, go to sleep."

Ilia distinguished his uncle sitting at the edge of the forest on a hillock, and looking in the darkness like the stump of a tree rooted up.

"I am afraid," said the boy.

"Well, what's the matter? What's there to be afraid of? We are alone."

"Somebody is howling."

"You dreamt that," said the hunchback, quietly.

"But really somebody is howling."

"Well it's a wolf—far away; go to sleep."

But Ilia could not go to sleep again. He was afraid of the stillness, and in his ears the mournful sound still rang. He looked round attentively, and saw that his uncle was gazing in the direction of the hilltop, far away in the middle of the forest, on which stood a white church with five domes, lighted up by the big round moon. Ilia knew that it was the Romodanovski church, and that at the distance of two versts from it, between the church and themselves, in the middle of the forest, near the ravine, stood their village Kiteznaia.

"We have not gone far," he said thoughtfully.

"What?" asked his uncle.

"It would be better to go on, I say. Somebody might come from there."

Ilia nodded with enmity in the direction of his village.

"We'll go on all right ; wait a little," murmured his uncle.

And again all became still. Ilia huddled himself up and, leaning against the front of the cart, began looking in the same direction as his uncle. The village was not visible in the dense blackness of the forest, but it seemed to him that he could see it all, with its cottages and people and its old willow near the well in the middle of the street. Under the willow he saw his father, tied by a rope, in a torn shirt ; his hands twisted behind his back, his bare chest protruding, while his head seemed to have grown to the trunk of the willow. He was quite motionless like one dead, his eyes fixed with a terrible expression upon the moujiks, who were gathered near the starosta's cottage. There were lots of them, all looking malignant, shouting at the top of their voices and reviling. At these remembrances the boy felt a sadness creeping over him and a lump rising in his throat. The loneliness and the cold night air made him feel inclined to cry ; but he did not want to disturb his uncle, and so bravely repressed his sobs, huddling his poor little body into a heap.

Suddenly, through the still night, the plaintive howl again resounded. Then a heavy sigh, a sob, and a pitiful moan :—

"O-o-y-o-o!"

The boy shuddered and remained petrified, while the sound trembled in the air, and grew louder and louder.

"Uncle ! is it you howling ?" cried Ilia.

Terence did not answer, and did not move. The boy jumped down from the cart, ran up to his uncle, fell at his feet, caught hold of them, and began to cry. Through his sobs he heard his uncle's voice saying,—

"They have driven us away. O God ! Where shall we go to—ay ?"

The boy, choking with sobs, murmured,—

"Wait a little till I grow up. I'll give it to them! Yes—"

Worn out by grief he began to dose. His uncle took him in his arms and put him into the cart, and then went back to his place on the hillock, and began to moan again slowly and plaintively.

Ilia long remembered his arrival in the town. He woke up early one morning, and beheld in front of him a big river, broad and muddy, on the other side of which was a high hill covered with houses, with red and green roofs, surrounded by high, thick trees. The houses rose one above the other up the sides of the hill, in close and beautiful array, to the very summit, whence in a straight line they proudly overlooked the river. The golden crosses and domes of the churches rose high above the roofs into the sky. The sun had just risen; its slanting rays were reflected in the windows of the houses, and the whole town was alight with bright colours and shining like gold.

"Well, this is something!" cried the boy, looking with wide-open eyes at the beautiful picture, and remaining transfixed in silent admiration. And then in his heart rose the uneasy question as to where he, a small, dark-skinned, shock-headed boy in torn ticken trousers, and his hunchback, awkward uncle, would live? Would they be allowed to enter this clean, rich, big town, that sparkled with gold? It seemed to him that their cart had stopped on this side of the river because poor, tattered and ugly people were not allowed to enter the town; and he supposed his uncle had gone to ask to be let in.

Ilia began to look round for his uncle with fear in his heart. In front and behind their cart stood a great many waggons; in some of which there were wooden frames with pails of milk, and in others baskets with birds, cucumbers, onions, berries and bags of potatoes. In and near the waggons sat and stood peasant men and women, who seemed to be a special set of people. They talked loudly and distinctly, and did not wear blue ticken, but were dressed in bright-coloured printed calico and bright red fustian

stuff. Nearly all of them wore boots, and although there was someone with a sword walking about close to them—an ouriadnik or stanovoi—not only were they unafraid of him, but did not even bow to him. All this pleased Ilia very much. Seated in his cart, he looked down upon the brightly-lighted living picture, and dreamed of the time when he too would wear boots and a red fustian shirt. At last, amongst the moujiks appeared Uncle Terence. He walked along, holding his head high and pressing his feet deep into the sand; his face was joyous, and he smiled at Ilia from a distance, holding out his hand and showing him something.

"God is for us, Ilia! That means—don't worry! I found Uncle Petruha without any bother. Here, nibble at this for the present."

And he gave Ilia a round cracknel.

The boy took it almost with veneration, hid it in his shirt, and asked uneasily,—

"Won't they let us enter the town?"

"Soon. When the ferry comes—then we shall start."

"We too?"

"Why, of course; we'll go too. We can't live here."

"Oh! I was afraid they would not let us. But where shall we live there?"

"That I don't know. God will show us."

"If we could live in that big red one."

"You little duffer! those are barracks. Soldiers live there."

"Well, in that one over there."

"Ah! that's a bit high for us."

"Never mind," said Ilia, decidedly, "we'll climb up."

"Oh, dear," sighed Uncle Terence, and again went off.

CHAPTER II

IT was their lot to live on the outskirts of the town, near the market-place, in an enormous grey building. Outhouses adhered to its walls on all sides; some of them quite new, while the rest were of a dirty grey colour, and as old as the house itself. The windows and doors of the house were crooked and everything creaked. The outhouses, fences and gates were huddled one against the other, forming one mass of rotting wood, covered with green moss. The window-panes were dim from age, several beams of the front of the house protruded; all this made the house resemble the proprietor, who kept an eating-house in it: he also was old and grey; his eyes dim like the window-panes; he walked leaning heavily on a thick creaking stick, appearing to move his fat body with difficulty.

Uncle Terence settled down in one of the numerous corners of the house, on the ground floor, on a bench near the window, which opened into the yard, in which a large heap of rubbish lay, and where grew a fragrant lime tree and two elders. Three days later the proprietor went creaking about, and, pointing his stick at Ilia, who was hiding behind the heap of rubbish and looking at him with frightened eyes, asked,—

“Whose boy are you, eh? Where did you come from?”

Ilia winced, but did not answer.

“Hullo, whose boy is that? Let him begone! Go away, boy, I’ll give it to you. Uhr-r-r! Oh, you little rat! What! the man who washes the dishes? His son? Ah, ha! his nephew. The humpbacked cheat, he ought to have said that he had a nephew. Peter! what are you thinking about? The hunchback has a nephew—what does it mean? Send him away.”

The ruddy barman, Petruha, looked out of a window of the eating-house into the yard, and, shaking his curls, called out,—

“He’s here only for a time, Vasili Dorimendontich, he’s a little boy, an orphan. He’s here by my permission, but I can send him away if you like.”

When Ilia heard that he was going to be sent away, he began to cry, flew past the proprietor like an arrow from a bow, and slipped through the window to his corner like a mouse into its hole. He tumbled on to the bench and, covering his head with his uncle’s overcoat, began to cry, trembling with fear; but his uncle came up and quieted him.

“Never mind, don’t be afraid. He just scolds for nothing. He’s in his second childhood, the chief person here is Petruha, and not he—Petruha’s at the head of everything. You must be courteous and respectful to him. The proprietor here has nothing to do with it.”

During the first days that Ilia passed in this house, he climbed about everywhere, and explored everything. The house pleased and amazed him by its capacity. It was so filled with people, that it seemed to Ilia to contain more people than the whole village of Kiteznaia; and it was as noisy as a market-place. The eating-house occupied both floors and was always full of people; in the attics lived a few drunken women; one of whom, called Matitsa, a big, dark, barefooted woman, frightened the boy with her angry black eyes. The cellar was occupied by (1) Perfishka, the shoemaker, his sick wife, who had lost the use of her feet, and his seven-year-old daughter; (2) Jeremiah, the rag-picker; (3) an old beggar woman, thin and noisy, nicknamed by all the inhabitants of the yard “Half a Squad”; and (4) a cabman, Makar Stepanich by name, a middle-aged, peaceful and silent man. In a corner of the yard stood a smithy; from morning to night there burnt a fire in it, and the whole day long wheels were cased, horses shod, hammers clanged, and Savel, the tall, sinewy smith, sang endless songs in a thick, sullen voice. Sometimes Savel’s wife would make her appearance

in the smithy ; she was a small, stout woman, fair and blue-eyed. She always wore a white shawl on her head, and her fair face formed a strange contrast to the black hole of the smithy. She was nearly always laughing a silvery laugh, while Savel joined in a loud voice like the blow of a hammer. But oftener in answer to her laugh he would only growl. People said he loved his wife, but she led a loose life.

There were men in every corner of the house, and from morning till night it resounded with shouts and noise, just as if it were an old rusty kettle in which something was eternally boiling. In the evening everybody crawled out of his corner into the yard or sat on the bench at the gate ; the shoemaker, Perfishka, played on his harmonium, Savel hummed songs, while Matitsa, if she were tipsy, would sing something very sad, in words that no one understood, and cry bitterly.

In some nook in the yard all the children who lived in the house would gather round Grandfather Jeremiah, and seating themselves in a ring would entreat,—

“Grandfather ! Tell us a tale !”

The old man would look at them with his weak red eyes, from which tears constantly trickled down his wrinkled cheeks, and pulling his old weather-worn hat over his eyes, would begin in a trembling sing-song thin voice,—

“Once upon a time in a certain country there was born a freemason, an unbeliever, upon whose head our Lord, the All-seeing God, visited the sins of his unknown parents.”

Jeremiah's long grey beard shook when he opened his black toothless mouth, his head shook also, while tear after tear trickled down his wrinkled cheeks.

“Great was the wickedness of this man : he did not believe in Jesus Christ, he did not love the Virgin Mary ; when he passed a church he never bowed, and never obeyed his mother or father.”

The children listened to the old man's thin, trembling voice, and silently gazed into his face.

His most attentive listener was light-haired Yashka, Petruha the barman's son. He was a lank boy, sharp-

nosed, with a great head on a thin neck. When he ran his head bobbed from shoulder to shoulder, as if it were going to fall off. His eyes were large and had a restless expression in them; they always moved furtively from object to object as if they were afraid to stop at anything, but when they did rest upon something they seemed to protrude strangely and stare, giving Jacob's face the look of a sheep. He was conspicuous among all the other children by his thin, colourless face and clean, untorn clothes. Ilia made friends with him at once and the very first day of their acquaintanceship Jacob asked his new friend in a mysterious voice,—

"Have you many sorcerers in your village?"

"Yes," answered Ilia, "and we have witches too."

"With red hair?" asked Jacob in a whisper.

"No, grey; they are all grey."

"If they are grey it's not so bad. Grey ones are kind, but if they are red-haired— Oh! those drink blood."

They were sitting in the best and cosiest corner of the yard, behind a heap of rubbish, under the elder and lime trees. It was only through a narrow passage between the shed and house that they could get there; it was always quiet, and there was nothing to be seen but a patch of sky above their heads, and a wall with three windows, two of which were nailed up; this was the favourite haunt of the two friends. In the branches of the lime tree the sparrows chirped, while on the earth at its roots sat the boys and talked quietly about everything that interested them.

The whole day long there danced before Ilia's eyes something enormous, many-coloured and noisy, which blinded and deafened him. At first he felt lost and stupefied in this teeming vortex of life. Standing near the table of the eating-house, at which Uncle Terence, covered with sweat, washed up the dishes, Ilia saw how people came, ate, drank, shouted, kissed each other, fought and sang songs. They were covered with sweat, tired and dirty, while clouds of tobacco smoke floated around them, and often they behaved as if they were half mad.

"Ay, ay!" his uncle used to say, shaking his hump and tinkling his glasses incessantly. "What are you doing here? Go into the yard! Else the proprietor will see you and scold you!"

"Oh, my!" Ilia would say to himself, and, stunned by the noise of the public-house, would go out into the yard.

In the yard Savel hammered away and scolded his apprentice; from the cellar floated forth the joyous song of the shoemaker, Perfishka; from the attic resounded bad language and shouts of drunken women. Pashka, nicknamed "the Biter," Savel's son, rode about on his stick and shouted angrily,—

"Wo back, you devil!"

His round, provoking face was always covered with dirt and soot; on his forehead he had a bump; his shirt was torn, and through countless holes his strong body could be seen. He was the most saucy boy and the biggest bully in the yard; he twice beat the awkward Ilia, and when Ilia cried and told his uncle, the latter only shrugged his shoulders and said,—

"Well! there's nothing to be done. You must bear it; it will pass."

"I'll go and give it to him!" threatened Ilia, through his tears.

"Don't you dare to!" said his uncle, severely. "You mustn't on any account."

"And he?"

"He's different. He, you see, belongs here; while you are a stranger."

Ilia continued to threaten Pashka, till his uncle suddenly got angry, and shouted at him, a thing that rarely happened. Ilia dimly felt that he could not be equal with the boys belonging to the house, and nursing his hidden enmity to Pashka, became still greater friends with Jacob. Jacob was a sober lad; he never fought with anybody and did not even shout. He scarcely ever played, but liked to talk about the games that rich children played at in their yards and in the public garden. Of all the children in the yard he made friends with no one except Ilia and seven-year-old

Masha, Perfishka the shoemaker's daughter. She was a dark little girl, thin and delicate; her little head, covered with black curls, was to be seen in the yard from morning till night.

Her mother was always sitting at her door. She was a tall woman, with a thick plait down her back, always sewing and bending low over her work; when she lifted her head to look at her daughter, Ilia saw her face. It was fat, blue and rigid like that of a corpse, with kind, black, expressionless eyes. She never spoke to anyone, even calling her daughter to her side by signs, and only very rarely saying in a hoarse, choking voice,—

“Masha.”

At first there was something Ilia liked in this woman, but when he was told that three years ago she had lost the use of her feet and would soon die, he began to feel afraid of her.

Once, as he passed close by her, she put out her arm, caught hold of his shirt and drew the frightened boy to her side.

“I want to ask—” she said. “Don't harm Masha, don't harm her!”

She spoke with difficulty; she seemed to be choking.

“Don't harm her, dear!”

She looked into Ilia's face with pitiful eyes, and let him go. From that moment Ilia and Jacob began to wait tenderly on the shoemaker's daughter and tried to guard her from life's hardships. Ilia felt flattered by the request of a grown-up person, because all the other grown-up people only gave orders, and always beat the little ones. The cabman, Makar, kicked and smacked the little boys' faces with a wet towel if they came too near when he was washing his droshky. Savel got angry with everyone who looked into his smithy not for business but out of curiosity, and threw the coal-bags at the children. Perfishka threw anything that came handy at anybody who stopped near his window and got in his light. Sometimes they beat the children without any reason, just because they had nothing to do for the moment, or else as a joke. Only Father Jeremiah never beat anyone.

Soon Ilia came to the conclusion that it was much better to live in the country than in town. In the country he could walk wherever he liked, while here his uncle forbade him to go out of the yard; in the country he could eat cucumbers, peas, and all sorts of things, while here there was no kitchen-garden and everything had to be bought with money. There it was quieter, and there was more space, there everyone did the same work, while here everyone scolded, pushed one another, did what work he liked, and all were poor, ate bread sown and reaped by others, and all were hungry. Ilia knocked about the yard from day to day, and began to get tired of living near the grey heavy house with its dusty windows.

One day at dinner Uncle Terence sighed heavily and said to his nephew,—

“The autumn is approaching, Ilia. M-yes. It’ll screw us up, it will—tightly. O God!”

He sat reflecting and was quiet for a long time, looking despondingly into his plate of cabbage soup. The boy began to meditate too. They dined at the table on which the hunchback washed up. In the eating-house there was an awful din.

“Petruha says I ought to send you to school together with his Jacob. Ha, ha! I know I ought to. Not to be able to read or write is as bad as to lose your eyes! you’re done for! But you must be decently clothed and shod for school! With five roubles a month one can’t go very far with clothing! O Lord! All my hope is in you.”

What with his uncle’s sighs and sad face, Ilia felt his heart oppressed with grief, and he said quietly,—

“Let’s go away from here.”

“Where to?” drawled the hunchback, plaintively. “Where can we go to?”

“Into the forest,” said Ilia, and with sudden animation continued: “How many years did my grandfather live in the forest all alone! And there are two of us! We would bark lime trees! We’d shoot foxes and squirrels, like Corney the Crooked. You’d have a gun, while I’d set traps. I would catch all sorts of

birds. Really! Then there are lots of berries and mushrooms. Do let's go?"

His uncle looked at him kindly and asked, with a smile,—

"And the wolves and bears?"

"But if we had a gun?" answered Ilia, hotly. "When I grow up I sha'n't be afraid of animals. I'll strangle them with my hands! I'm not afraid of anything even now! Here it's a hard living! Although I'm small, I see it all the same. Here people fight worse than in the country. Yes, I can feel; I'm not made of wood! When the smith knocks me on the head I feel it the whole day afterwards! And all the people here are battered about, in spite of their airs."

"You dear orphan of God!" said Terence, and, throwing down his spoon, rose hastily and went out.

That same evening Ilia, tired out with rambling about in the yard, where he knew every corner, was sitting on the floor near his uncle's table and listened half asleep to what Terence was saying to Jeremiah, who had entered the eating-house to drink tea. The rag-picker was great friends with the hunchback, and, coming home from work, always sat down near Terence's table to drink his tea.

"Never mind!" Ilia heard Jeremiah's creaky voice saying. "Just you hope in God! Have only one thought—God! Him! You're something like His serf—in the Holy Scriptures it is said, you are His slave, and all that belongs to you belongs to God! The good and the bad are all His! He'll set everything to rights, He sees your life, He sees everything! And a happy day will come, when He will say to one of His angels: My heavenly servant! go and make life easier for Terence, my peaceful serf. And your happiness will come to you on that day—it will come!"

"Grandfather, my hope is in Him, what can I do more?" said Terence, softly. "I believe He will help!"

"He? I tell you, He will never abandon a single man on this earth. This earth is given to us by God to try us, to see if we will do His will. He looks down from the heights to see if we love each other. 'Do you

love each other as I told you to?' And if He sees that it is too hard for Terence, He sends a message to Jeremiah saying: Jeremiah, just help My servant!"

And suddenly changing his voice, and making it sound like Petruha the barman's when he was angry, the old man said to Terence,—

"For Ilia's outfit I will give you five roubles. I'll scrape a little and get them. I'll lend them to you. When you get rich you'll give them back."

"Grandfather!" exclaimed Terence, softly.

"Stop, be quiet! Meantime give the boy over to me, he has nothing to do here! He'll do me a service. He can pick up rags and bones and I won't have to bend my old back."

"Oh, God bless you!" cried the hunchback in a ringing voice.

"The Lord gives to me, I—to you, you—to him, he—back again to the Lord, that's how the wheel goes round, and nobody will owe anything to anybody. Ha, ha, ha! Dear me! Brother mine! I have lived and lived, looked and looked—I see nothing but God. Everything's His, everything's for Him, everything's from Him."

Ilia fell asleep to the sound of these peaceful words. And on the next day Jeremiah woke him up early and said,—

"Let's go out, Ilia! Hurry up! Rub your eyes open!"

CHAPTER III

A PLEASANT life began for Ilia under the kind rule of Grandfather Jeremiah. Every day the old man woke the boy in the early morning, and the whole day long until late in the evening they walked about the town, gathering rags, bones, torn paper, bits of iron, pieces of leather. The town was very large, and there were many interesting sights to be seen, so that at first Ilia was a poor help to Jeremiah, as he did nothing but look at all the houses and people, wondering at everything and asking questions about all he saw. Jeremiah was fond of talking. Bending his head low and looking at the ground, he went from yard to yard, tapping with the iron end of his stick upon the flagstones, while he wiped the tears from his face with his tattered sleeve or with the end of his dirty bag and talked without stopping in a sing-song monotonous voice to his helpmate.

"This house belongs to the merchant Ptchelin, Savva Petrovich. He is a rich man, is Ptchelin! He is served on silver and crystal."

"Grandfather!" asked Ilia, "how do people get rich?"

"Oh! they labour for it, that means they work. They work day and night and gather money all the time. And when they've got enough, they build themselves a house, buy horses, plate and all such like. And everything new! And they hire clerks, porters and all sorts of people to work in their stead, while they rest and live. Then people say: He's got rich by honest labour—h'm yes! But there are some who grow rich through sin. They say that merchant Ptchelin ruined his soul when he was yet a young man. Perhaps they say so out of jealousy, but perhaps it's the truth. Ptchelin is a bad man, he has a furtive look in his eyes,

they are constantly moving from side to side and try to hide themselves. But perhaps those are lies about Ptchelin. Sometimes a man gets rich all at once, simply through luck. Luck smiles on him. Heigho! God is the only One who lives in righteousness, while none of us know anything. We're men. Men are God's seeds, dear! God sowed us on the earth, saying: Grow, while I look down and see what sort of grain you will bear. That's how it is. That house over there belongs to Sabaneieff, Mitri Pavlich. He's still richer than Ptchelin. And he's a regular villain—I know. I am not judging him, God judges, but I know for certain. He was bailiff in our village, and sold us all and robbed us of everything. God bore with him for a long time and then began to square accounts. First of all, Mitri Pavlich grew deaf, then his son was killed by his horses. And not long ago they say his daughter ran away from home."

The old man knew everything and everyone in the town and talked about everything quite simply, without spite. Everything that he talked about seemed to be pure, just as if he had washed each tale in his ever-flowing tears.

The boy listened to him attentively, looking up at the enormous houses, and said now and then,—

"If I could only peep inside, just with one eye."

"You shall have a glimpse. Wait a little. Just learn and work, when you grow up you will see everything. Perhaps you'll be rich yourself. Just keep on living, oh, dear! oh, dear! Here have I lived and lived, looked and looked, and have ruined my eyes. The tears keep on flowing and that's why I am thin and ill. I have melted away in tears, and my blood has dried up."

It was pleasant for Ilia to listen to the old man's confident and loving discourse about God, and under the influence of his kindly words a cheerful and strong hope in something good and joyful that awaited him in the future sprang up in the boy's heart. He became more light-hearted and childlike than in the beginning of his life in town. He began to help the old man in his rummaging in the rubbish with enthusiasm. It was very interesting

to pick about in the different heaps of rubbish with a stick, and it was a particularly great pleasure to Ilia to see the old man's joy when they found something unusual. Once Ilia found a big silver spoon in one of the dustbins, and the old man bought him a half pound of peppermint biscuits for it. Another time he dug out a small purse, covered with green mould, with more than a rouble in it. Sometimes they found knives, forks, screws, broken copper-ware, good tins from shoe-blackening and preserves, and once in a ravine, where the refuse of the whole town was heaped together, Ilia found quite a good, heavy brass candlestick. For each valuable thing the old man bought Ilia a present.

When he found something valuable, Ilia would call out joyously,—

"Grandfather, look, just look! There's something for you! While the old man, bustling and anxious, would look round and admonish him, saying,—

"Don't cry out so loud! Don't cry out! O Lord!"

He always got frightened when they found anything unusual, and snatching it hastily from the boy, would hide it in his enormous bag.

"This time I've caught a fine fish!" Ilia would boastfully call out, excited by his success.

"Be quiet, hold your tongue, my dear child!" the old man would say kindly, while the tears trickled incessantly from his weak red eyes.

"Look, grandfather, what a big bone!" Ilia would shout again.

Bones and rags did not excite the old man; he would take them from the boy, scrape off the dirt with a chip of wood, and put them quietly in his bag. He made Ilia a small bag, and gave him a stick with an iron point of which the boy was very proud. Ilia would put in this bag boxes, broken playthings, and pretty bits of glass and china, and it was a pleasure to him to feel them at his back and to hear them knocking together. He learnt how to gather these things from Grandfather Jeremiah.

"Pick up all these bits and take them home, there you can give them to the children, and that will be a

pleasure to them. And a good thing it is to give pleasure to people—it is pleasant to the Lord. Ay, my dear boy! All people need joy, but there is little gladness in this world. There's so little gladness that sometimes people live and live and never find it, never!"

Ilia liked the refuse heaps outside the town better than going from yard to yard. No one was to be seen near these heaps except two or three old men like Jeremiah, who picked about in the rubbish; and there was no need to look round in fear of the dvornik with his broom, who might pounce down at any moment, using bad language and send them away, or even give them a blow.

Every day, after having picked about in the rubbish heaps for an hour or two, Jeremiah would say to the boy,—

"That's enough, Ilia, dear, that's enough! let's sit down and rest, and eat something."

He would take out of his shirt a piece of bread, cross himself, break it in two, and they would eat; after that they lay down on the edge of the ravine and rested for half an hour. The mouth of the ravine opened upon the river which they could see. Broad and silvery blue, it quietly rolled past the ravine, and when Ilia looked upon it he felt a longing to float away down upon the stream. On the other side of the river stretched green meadows with haystacks, like grey towers dotted about, and far away on the horizon the dark zig-zag outline of a forest stood out sharply against the blue sky. It was peaceful and bright in the meadows and the air was pure and clear and sweet, while near the ravine it was heavy with the smell of decaying rubbish; an oppressive smell which tickled Ilia's nose, and made his eyes water like the old man's.

"See, Ilia, dear, how extensive the earth is," the old man would say, "and all over it men live and struggle, while God looks down upon them from the sky and sees and knows everything. Every thought of man—He knows. That's why He is called All-knowing Lord, God of Sabaoth, Jesus Christ. He knows all, reckons

up everything, remembers everything. You can hide your sins from man, but you can't from Him. He sees, and He says: Oh, you sinner, you wretched sinner! Just wait, I'll give you your deserts! And when the hour strikes—He'll punish you, He'll punish you badly. He told us to love each other, and ordained that if a person does not love anybody nobody loves him. And that person has to live all alone; his is a dreary life, and he has no joys."

Lying on his back the boy looked up at the sky and could not see the end of it. A sadness and a drowsiness crept over him, and big, obscure shapes rose in his imagination. It seemed to him, that something enormous and indefinable, transparently radiant, soothing and warming, kind and severe, floated above him in the sky, and that he, a little boy, together with the old man and the whole earth, was mounting up to it, to the limitless heights, the blue radiance of purity and light. And his heart was filled with a quiet and peaceful joy.

In the evening, when Ilia came home he entered the yard with the important and stand-off air of a man who has done a good day's work, wishes to rest, and has no time for nonsense like all the other boys and girls. He inspired respect in the children by his imposing carriage and the bag on his back, in which there were always interesting things.

The old man smiled at the children and would make some joke.

"Here we are back again, after going all over the town and poking our noses everywhere. Ilia, go and wash your face and come to the eating-house and have some tea."

Ilia would go swaggering to his cellar while the children went after him in a crowd, carefully feeling the contents of the bag. Then Pashka, getting into Ilia's way, would say insolently,—

"Eh, old clothes! Here, show us what you've brought."

"Just wait," Ilia would answer loftily. "When I've had my tea I will show you."

In the eating-house his uncle would meet him, smiling kindly,—

"So you're back, little workman? Oh, you dear one, tired?"

Ilia liked to be called a workman, and it was not only by his uncle that he was so called. Once Pashka got into mischief, and Savel got hold of him, and squeezing his head between his knees, began lashing him with a rope, repeating,—

"Don't get into mischief, you rogue, don't get into mischief. That's for you, and that, and that! Other children at your age earn their living, while you only eat and tear your clothes!" Pashka yelled at the top of his voice and kicked, while the rope fell heavily on his back. Ilia listened to the angry hurt cries of his enemy with a strange pleasure, and the words of the smith filled him with the consciousness of his superiority over Pashka, and then he felt sorry for the boy.

"Uncle Savel, let him go!" suddenly he called out. "Uncle Savel!"

The smith gave his son a last blow and, glancing at Ilia, said angrily,—

"There you! hold your tongue! Interceder indeed! I'll give it to you."

Pashka got on to his feet, and, stumbling as if he were blind, went off to a dark corner of the yard. Ilia, full of pity, went after him. In the corner Pashka went down on his knees, pressed his forehead against the wall, and, stroking his back, began to cry still louder. Ilia wanted to say something kind to his beaten enemy, but he only asked him,—

"Does it hurt?"

"Go away!" cried Pashka.

This offended Ilia, and he said instructively,—

"There, you beat everybody, now it's your turn." But before he had time to finish his sentence, Pashka threw himself upon him and knocked him down. Ilia got wild, caught hold of Pashka, and they both fell to the ground in a heap. Pashka bit and scratched, while Ilia, catching him by his hair, began knocking his head against the ground, until Pashka called out,—

"Let me go!"

"That's better!" said Ilia, getting upon his feet and proud of his victory. "You see I'm stronger than you! Which means: don't meddle with me or else I'll beat you still more."

He went off, wiping the blood from his face with the sleeve of his shirt. In the middle of the yard stood Savel with an angrily lowered brow. Ilia, seeing him, shuddered with fear and stopped short, being certain that the smith was going to pay him back for what he had done to his son. But Savel only shrugged his shoulders and said,—

"Well, what are you staring at me for? Have you never seen me before? Go where you were going."

In the evening, catching Ilia by the gate, Savel rapped him slightly on the forehead, and, smiling in a surly way, asked,—

"How's your business, rag-picker, eh?"

Ilia chuckled delightedly—he was pleased.

The fierce smith, the strongest man in the yard, whom everyone feared and respected, was actually joking with him. The smith caught hold of his shoulder with his iron fingers, and added to his gladness by saying,—

"Oh, oh!—why, you are quite a strong boy; you won't wear out soon. Well, go on growing; when you're grown up I'll take you into the smithy."

Ilia put his arms round the enormous leg of the smith and pressed himself against it. Savel must have felt the palpitation of the little heart, suffocated by his rough caress; he put his heavy hand on Ilia's head, was still for a moment, and then said in a husky voice,—

"Eh, you orphan! here, let go!"

Radiant with happiness was Ilia that evening when he set about his usual occupation — giving away the treasures that he had gathered during the day. The children had long been waiting for him. They seated themselves on the ground round him, and gazed at the dirty bag with greedy eyes. Ilia

took out of the bag a piece of chintz, a wooden soldier, who had lost all colour through his misfortunes, an empty tin of shoe-blackening, an empty jar of pomatum and a chipped teacup without a handle.

"That's for me, for me!" sounded envious voices, and little dirty hands stretched out for the much-desired objects.

"Wait a bit; don't touch," ordered Ilia. "How can we play if you go and take everything at once? Here, I open my shop. I am selling a piece of chintz, the very best chintz! It costs fifty copecks. Masha, buy it."

"I've bought it," answered Jacob, "for the shoemaker's daughter," getting out of his pocket a bit of earthenware prepared for the occasion, and putting it into the shopkeeper's hand. But Ilia would not take it.

"Why, that's not playing! You must bargain, you devil! You never bargain. That's not the way."

"I forgot," answered Jacob in self-defence; and the bargaining would begin, the seller and the buyer getting hot over it, and in the meantime Pashka would cleverly catch hold of what he wanted out of the heap, run away, and, dancing about, would tease them.

"I've stolen it! I've stolen it! you gaping fools! you devils!"

At first his tricks made them all furious; the little ones screamed and cried, while Jacob and Ilia chased the thief all over the yard, but could seldom catch him. They soon got accustomed to his ways and did not expect any good of him; they all took a cordial dislike to him, and stopped playing with him; and Pashka lived an outcast and was disagreeable to everyone. Meanwhile big-headed Jacob was like a nurse to the shoemaker's little curly-haired daughter. She accepted all his kindness and care as her due, and, although she called him little Jacob, she often beat and scratched him. His friendship for Ilia grew stronger and stronger every day and he was always telling his friend strange dreams.

"It was as if I had lots of money, all roubles, an

enormous bagful. I was dragging it along in a forest, when suddenly robbers appeared armed with knives, and dreadful looking. I began to run; and suddenly something in the bag began to flutter. I threw it down, and out of it different birds fluttered—fr-r-r! greenfinches, tomtits, goldfinches—numbers of them! They all caught me up and carried me high up, ever so high!" Then he would suddenly stop, his eyes protruding and a sheepish look on his face.

"Well?" Ilia would encourage him, waiting for the end with impatience.

"And I flew quite away," Jacob would finish thoughtfully.

"Where to?"

"Oh, quite away."

"Just like you," Ilia would say in a disappointed and scornful voice. "You never remember anything."

Presently Jeremiah would come out of the eating-house, and, shading his eyes, would call out,—

"Little Ilia, where are you? Go to bed, it's time." Ilia would follow the old man obediently and lie down on his bed—a big sack stuffed with hay. His slumbers on this sack were sweet, and his life was easy under the care of the rag-picker, but very soon this happy time came to an end.

CHAPTER IV

GRANDFATHER JEREMIAH kept his word: he bought Ilia a pair of boots, a great, heavy coat and a cap, and the boy was sent to school. He went off full of curiosity and fear, and came back outraged and despondent, with tears in his eyes; the boys had recognised in him Jeremiah's helpmate, and had set about teasing him mercilessly.

"Rag-picker! stinking, stinking rag-picker!"

Some of the boys pinched him, others put out their tongues at him, while one came close up to him, sniffing the air, and suddenly, with a grimace, sprang aside, crying out,—

"What a stench!"

"Why do they tease me?" he asked, perplexed and hurt. "Is there any disgrace in picking up rags?"

"Never mind," Terence answered, stroking the boy's head and hiding his face from his nephew's searching and questioning eyes. "They just do it out of mischief. Never mind, be patient. They'll get accustomed to you, and you'll get used to them."

"But they jeer at my boots and coat. They said it belonged to somebody else and had been pulled out of a dustbin."

Grandfather Jeremiah, winking cheerily, also comforted him, saying,—

"Bear it. He'll reckon it up; that He will, dear one. There's nobody but Him."

The old man talked about God with such joy and faith in His righteousness, as if he knew all God's thoughts and had fathomed all His intentions. And Jeremiah's words seemed to extinguish the anger

in the boy's heart, but on the next day it blazed up with renewed force. Ilia was accustomed to look upon himself as a person of importance—a work man; even Savel the smith had talked to him benevolently, and yet the schoolboys laughed and jeered at him. He could not reconcile himself to this; and every day his mortification grew stronger and more deeply engraved in his mind and heart. Going to school became a heavy and disagreeable task to him. He held himself aloof. From the very beginning he had attracted the master's notice by his intelligence, and was held up as an example to the other children, which put him on still worse terms with the other boys. Sitting on the front seat, he continually felt enemies behind his back, while they, having him always before their eyes, carefully observed everything that they could tease him about, and tormented him accordingly. Jacob also went to this school and did not stand high in the opinion of his schoolfellows, they nicknamed him "Sheep." Absent-minded and of poor capacities, he was continually punished, but without effect. It seemed as if he did not notice what was going on around him, but lived apart by himself at school as well as at home. He had his own thoughts and nearly every day made Ilia wonder at his strange questions. One day he would ask thoughtfully, screwing up his eyes,—

"Ilia! How is it—people have small eyes and can see everything? They can see a whole town. The whole street for instance. How can it get in, being so big?" Or, looking up at the sky, he would suddenly remark, "And the sun."

"What about it?" asked Ilia.

"How it bakes!"

"Well?"

"Nothing. Do you know what I think? Perhaps it's the husband and the moon is his wife. That's how the stars come!"

At first Ilia used to ponder over these strange words, but afterwards they began to disturb him, lead-

ing his thoughts away from events that concerned him closely. Of such events there were plenty, and the boy had got into the way of observing them closely. One day he came home from school, and grinning in a nasty way, said to Grandfather Jeremiah,—

“What do you say to our master? He-he! He’s a knowing one! Yesterday the son of the shopkeeper Malafeieff broke a pane in the window, and he only scolded him a little and paid for a new glass with his own money.”

“You see what a kind man he is,” said Jeremiah, affected.

“Kind, indeed! And when Vanka Klucharoff broke a pane, he kept him without his dinner and then called Vanka’s father and said: ‘Give me forty copecks for the glass!’ And the father gave Vanka a licking! That’s the sort he is!”

“Don’t notice such things, Ilusha,” the old man advised, blinking anxiously. “Consider that it is not your business. To sort out the right and wrong is God’s right and not ours! We can’t! We always see the wrong, but we never find the right. While He will consider all. He knows the weight and measure of all things. Here I’ve lived and lived, looked and looked. I’ve seen such lots of evil, it’s impossible to count it all. But the good I’ve not seen at all. I’m eighty years old. And yet it’s impossible that during all those years there never was any good near me on the earth. But I did not see it. I don’t understand it.”

“Well,” said Ilia, doubtfully, “what is there to understand? If you take forty copecks from one, you must take forty from the other; there’s the right!”

The old man did not acquiesce to this. He talked a great deal about himself and the blindness of men, that they cannot judge each other, and only God’s judgment is just. Ilia listened to him attentively, but his face grew more morose and his eyes darkened.

“When will God sit in judgment?” he asked the old man suddenly.

“Nobody knows! The hour will strike and He will descend from the clouds to judge the living and

dead—but when? Nobody knows! Look here, let's go to church on Saturday evening."

"All right!"

"That's it!"

And on Saturday Ilia stood with the old man in the porch of the church, between two doors, together with the beggars. When the outer door opened, Ilia got a puff of frosty air from the street, his feet began to get chilled, and he tapped them softly on the stone floor. While through the glass door of the church he saw the flames of the candles mingling together into pretty patterns of trembling golden dots, and lighting up the radiant metal of the holy pictures, the black heads of the people, the faces of the saints and the beautiful carving of the Iconostasis. The people seemed to be kinder and more peaceful in the church than in the street; they were also handsomer in the golden radiance that lighted up their dark, silent and peaceful faces. When the door of the church opened a great wave of song, and the fragrance of incense, flowed into the porch, and enveloped the boy caressingly; he drew it in with rapture. It was good to stand there next to Grandfather Jeremiah, who was whispering prayers. He listened to the beautiful sounds that floated through the church, and waited with impatience for the moment when the door opened and they would burst upon him, loud and joyful, and he would get a whiff of fragrant, warm air in his face. He knew that Grishka Bubnoff, one of the most malicious teasers in the school, sang in the choir, and also Fedka Dolganoff, a strong boy and a great bully, who had beaten him several times; but he did not feel any offence or spite against them now, only a little envy. He too would have liked to sing in the choir, and look from thence at all the people's faces. It must be nice to stand near the golden gates of the altar, above all the people, and look at their quiet, peaceful faces. He left the church kind and ready to make friends with Bubnoff and Dolganoff and all the schoolboys. But on Monday he came home the same as usual—morose and angry.

In every crowd there is at least one man who feels

oppressed by it, but that does not mean that he is any worse or better than all the rest. One can attract a spiteful attention to oneself without possessing exceptional capacities or a funny nose; the crowd chooses someone for its amusement, being guided only by the desire to divert itself. In this case the choice fell on Ilia Luneff. To be sure he would eventually have got reconciled to it, and the crowd to him, but just at this time of Ilia's life there happened certain weighty events which quite crushed him and made his school life seem unimportant and insignificant.

One day, as Ilia approached the eating-house with Jacob, he saw that something was going on near the gates.

"Look!" he said to his schoolfellow, "there's another fight, I suppose? Let's run!"

They dashed forward, and arriving at the yard saw a lot of strange people, with frightened faces, running about and calling out,—

"Call the police! He must be bound!"

Near the smithy a great crowd was assembled, silent and still. The children worked their way to the front and then recoiled. At their feet, on the snow, lay a woman, face downwards; the back of her head was covered with blood and something pasty, while the snow on which she lay was dark red. Near her was a crumpled white handkerchief and a pair of enormous forge tongs. In the door of the smithy sat Savel, huddled together, and looking at the woman's hands. They were stretched forward, the wrists were dug deep into the snow, and the head lay between them, just as if the woman had tried to crawl away and hide herself. The smith's eyebrows were knit together sternly, his face was drawn, his teeth clenched; his cheekbones stood out in two great lumps. His right hand rested on the post of the door and his black fingers worked like the claws of a cat; otherwise everything in the smithy was motionless. But it seemed to Ilia every minute as if the smith were going to open his tightly-compressed lips, and cry out with all the strength of his broad chest.

The people looked at him silently; their faces were stern and determined, and although the yard was noisy and full of bustle, near the smithy there was neither sound nor movement. Suddenly Grandfather Jeremiah, dishevelled and covered with sweat, parted the crowd, and, with a trembling hand, held out to the smith a can of water, saying,—

“Here, take a drink.”

“It is not a drink that he deserves, but a loop round his neck,” said someone in a subdued voice. Savel took the can with his left hand, and drank for a long time; and when he had finished all the water, he looked into the empty can and began talking in a hollow voice.

“I warned her. Stop, you carrion, I said, or else I’ll kill you! I forgave her—how many times did I forgive her? But she took no heed. Well, there! And Pashka, he’s an orphan now. Grandfather, look after him. God loves you. Have an eye on him.”

“Oh, dear!” said the old man, softly, and touched the smith on the shoulder with his trembling hand, while a voice in the crowd said,—

“Oh! the villain! And he talks about God too!” At that the smith lifted his terrible eyes and bellowed forth,—

“What do you want? Be off, all of you!”

His cry acted like a whip upon the crowd, which grumbled in a surly way and dropped back. The gigantic smith got on to his feet, made a step towards the dead woman, then suddenly turned back and went into the smithy. Everyone could see him as he sat down on the anvil, caught hold of his head, as if it ached insufferably, and began rocking himself backwards and forwards. Ilia felt sorry for the smith; he went away from the smithy, and, as one in a dream, began walking about the yard from one group of people to another, listening to what they said, but not understanding anything. Before his eyes he saw a red blot, while his heart was sorely oppressed.

Then the police appeared and began to hustle the

people about ; afterwards they took the smith and led him away.

"Good-bye, good-bye, grandfather !" called out Savel, passing out of the gates.

"Good-bye, Savel Ivanich, good-bye, dear," hastily called out Jeremiah in a shrill voice, trying to go after him.

And he was the only one who said good-bye to the smith.

Standing about the yard in small groups, the people talked together, looking gloomily every now and then at the spot where the body of the woman, covered with a mat, was still lying. In the door of the smithy, in Savel's place, sat a police soldier with a pipe in his mouth. He was smoking, spitting at intervals, and, looking with dim eyes at Grandfather Jeremiah, listened to what he was saying.

"Do you think he killed her?" the old man was saying in a quiet and mysterious voice. "It was the evil power, that's who it was. A man can't kill another man. A man is good, he carries the image of God in himself. He cannot kill, it's a lie, good people!"

Jeremiah lifted his hands to his breast, as if he were pushing something from him, coughed, and continued to explain to the people the mystery of the event.

"For a long time the Black One kept whispering in his ear: Kill her!"

"A long time, do you say?" asked the policeman, with importance.

"A long time. 'She's yours, she is,' said he. But that's not true. A horse is mine, a dog is mine, but a wife is—God's. She's a human soul. She took her part in all the hardships that God allotted to us in Eden and bears them together with us men. But the Black One kept on whispering: 'Kill her, she's yours!' He wants us to go against God. He himself is God's enemy and wants to find an ally in man."

"Anyhow, it was not the devil who caught her with

the tongs, but the smith," said the policeman, and spat on the ground.

"But who gave him the thought?" cried the old man. "Just consider, who was the prompter?"

"Stop," said the policeman. "What's this smith to you? A son?"

"Oh, no!"

"Well, is he a relation?"

"N-no, I have no relations."

"Well, then, what are you troubling about?"

"I? O, Lord!"

"Listen to what I'll tell you," said the policeman, severely; "old age makes you talk all this rubbish. Be off."

The policeman sent out of the corner of his mouth a thick cloud of smoke, and turned away from the old man; but Jeremiah lifted up his hands and again began to speak hurriedly in a shrill voice. Ilia, pale and with wide-open eyes, went away from the smithy and stopped at a group of people, in which isvoschik Makar, Perfishka, Matista, and the other women from the attic stood.

"She led a loose life before her marriage, dears," said one of the women. "I know for sure. Perhaps even Pashka isn't the smith's son, but the master's of the gymnasium, who lived with the shopkeeper Malafeseff, and drank so."

"The one that shot himself?" asked Perfishka.

"The very same. She began with him."

"Anyhow, for all that it isn't right," said Makar, gravely. "That's far too simple. He'll kill his woman, I—mine."

"There won't be time to pick them all up," said the merry shoemaker, Perfishka. "There, my wife is also good for nothing, anyhow I bear her."

"It's a nice way you bear her, you devil!" said Matista, gruffly.

Meanwhile Perfishka's crippled wife crawled out into the yard, and, wrapped up in some rag or other, sat in her usual place at the entrance to the cellar. Her hands rested motionless in her lap, she lifted up

her head and looked up at the sky with her black eyes. Her lips were tightly compressed and drooped at the corners. Ilia began to look first into the woman's eyes and then into the depth of the sky, and the idea struck him that perhaps Perfishka's wife saw God and was silently asking Him for something.

Soon all the children gathered together in a close group at the entrance to the cellar. Huddling themselves up in their clothes, they sat on the steps, and, quite overwhelmed by an awe-stricken inquisitiveness, they listened to the tale of Savel's son. Pashka's face was drawn and his cunning eyes looked at everybody in an anxious and uneasy way; but he felt himself a hero; never had anyone paid so much attention to him as to-day. Repeating the same thing for the tenth time, he spoke in a reluctant, indifferent way,—

"Three days ago, when she went away, my father clenched his teeth, and since then he has been angry and growling all the time. As for me, he pulled my hair for every little thing. I saw then—oho! And then she came. Our lodgings were locked—we were both in the smithy. I stood at the bellows. I saw her come up, stop at the door and ask for the keys. But my father took up the forge tongs and went at her. He came out to her quietly as if he were creeping. I even shut my eyes, I was so frightened. I wanted to cry out, 'Run away, mother!' but could not. I opened my eyes and saw him still creeping. His eyes glared. She began to retreat backwards, then turned her back on him, I suppose she wanted to run." Pashka's face worked and his thin, awkward body began to quiver. Heaving a deep sigh, he said,—

"And then he banged her with the tongs."

All the children, who had been sitting motionless, began to tremble.

"She tossed up her arms and fell, as if she had plunged into water."

He stopped, picked up a chip of wood, examined it carefully, and threw it away over the children's heads. They sat motionless and silent, as if they were waiting

for him to say something more; but he did not utter another word, and sat with his head bent down.

"Did he kill her quite?" asked Masha in a shrill, trembling voice.

"Fool!" said Pashka, without lifting his head.

Jacob put his arms round the little girl and drew her closer to himself, while Ilia moved nearer to Pashka and asked him in a low voice,—

"Are you sorry for her?"

"And what business is that of yours?" responded Pashka, angrily.

At that they all looked up at him in silence.

"There! she was always walking the streets," sounded Masha's ringing voice, but Jacob hastily and anxiously interrupted her.

"No wonder! You see what sort of a husband the smith was. Always gloomy, terrible and grumbling, while she was merry like Perfishka. It was dull for her with the smith."

Pashka looked at him and began to talk in a surly and dictatorial way like a grown-up person.

"I said to her: 'Look out, mother! He'll kill you!' She would not listen. She would only ask me not to say anything about it. She bought me presents, and the sergeant-major used to give me five-copeck pieces. I would bring him a note and he would give me five copecks. He was kind. And so strong, with enormous moustaches."

"And had he a sword?" asked Masha.

"Yes, and what a size too!" answered Pashka, and added with pride, "I took it out of its sheath once—it was heavy, the devil!"

Jacob said thoughtfully,—

"And now you're an orphan like Ilia."

"Nothing of the sort," answered the orphan, disdainfully. "Do you think I'll go picking up rags too? Rather not."

"I don't mean that."

"I can do what I like," said Pashka, proudly lifting up his head and with eyes flashing angrily. "I'm not an orphan. I'm just going to live all alone. My father

did not want to send me to school, and now they are going to put him to prison, and I shall go to school and learn a bit better than you."

"But where will you get clothes from?" asked Ilia, smiling triumphantly. "They won't take you in if you are in tatters—eh?"

"Clothes? I will sell the smithy."

They all looked at Pashka with admiration and Ilia felt himself vanquished. Pashka noticed the impression he had made and soared still higher.

"And I shall buy a horse, a real live horse! And I shall ride to school."

This idea so pleased him that he even smiled, but in a half-frightened way—the smile hovering for an instant on his lips and then suddenly disappearing.

"Nobody will beat you any more," said Masha, suddenly, looking at him enviously.

"Oh! there will always be someone to do that," said Ilia, decidedly.

Pashka glanced at him, and, spitting defiantly on the ground, asked,—

"Who? You? Just try."

But Jacob interrupted them again.

"How strange it is, boys! Here was a human being who walked and talked and everything, like everyone else—she was alive—when someone knocked her on the head with a pair of forge tongs, and she's no more!"

The children, all three of them, looked at Jacob attentively, while his eyes protruded and remained wide open in a funny way.

"Y-yes," said Ilia. "I was thinking about that too."

"They say she's dead," continued Jacob, quietly, in a mysterious voice, "but what does dead mean?"

"It means the soul has flown away," explained Pashka, dismally.

"To heaven," added Masha, and, nestling against Jacob, looked up at the sky. The stars were beginning to come out; one of them—big and bright with a

steady light—seemed close to the earth and looked at it with a cold, motionless gaze. The three boys also lifted up their faces; Pashka only for one moment, and then ran away. Ilia looked fixedly at one spot for a long time with fear on his face, while Jacob's eyes wandered about the blue heavens as if they were searching for something.

"Jacob," called out his friend, lowering his head.

"Ay?"

"I'm thinking—" Ilia's voice stopped short.

"What about?" asked Jacob, softly.

"About—"

"Well?"

"How—it isn't right somehow—a human being was killed, and everyone bustled and ran about, talked all at once, but nobody cried, nobody was sorry."

"Y-yes, Jeremiah cried."

"He always does. But look at Pashka. He spoke just as if he was telling a tale."

"He's showing off. He's sorry but he's ashamed to cry before us. But now he's run off, and, I expect, he's crying fit to break his heart."

They sat silently for a few minutes, sitting close to each other.

Masha had fallen asleep on Jacob's lap, while her face still remained lifted up to the sky.

"Do you feel frightened?" asked Jacob in a whisper.

"Yes," answered Ilia in the same way.

"Her soul will wander about here."

"Y-yes. Masha's asleep."

"We must carry her home, but I'm afraid to move."

"Let's go together."

Jacob rested the head of the sleeping child on his shoulder, put his arms round her thin little body, and, getting his feet with an effort, said in a whisper,—

"Wait a bit, Ilia, I'll go in front."

He went, staggering under the weight of his burden, while Ilia walked behind, almost touching the back of his friend's head with his nose. It seemed to him

that some invisible person was following him, breathing coldly on his neck and ready any moment to seize him. He touched his friend in the back and said in a scarcely audible whisper,—

“Go on quicker!”

CHAPTER V

SOON after these events had occurred Grandfather Jeremiah began to grow ill. He went out rag-picking more seldom, and used to stop at home and wander drearily about the yard, or else lie in his dark corner. The spring was approaching, and on the days when the warm sun shone brightly in the clear sky, the old man would sit basking in the sun, anxiously counting something on his fingers, and noiselessly moving his lips. To the children he told his stories less frequently and not so well. He would begin, and then a fit of coughing would seize him. Something rattled in his chest, as if it were asking to be let free.

"That's enough for you!" Masha would tell him, although she liked the tales more than all the other children.

"Wait a little!" the old man would say, half choking. "Wait a little, it will—stop—in a minute."

But his cough did not stop, and shook the withered body of the old man still more. Sometimes the children would disperse without waiting for the end of the tale, and as they went the old man would look after them in a piteous way.

Ilia noticed that the old man's illness caused great anxiety to the barman, Petruha, and Uncle Terence. Petruha would appear at the back door of the eating-house several times a day, and, looking at the old man with his merry grey eyes, would ask,—

"How are you getting on, Grandfather? Are you better?"

Broad-shouldered and strong, in a pink chintz shirt, he walked about with his hands in the pockets of his wide cloth trousers, which were tucked into his shining, finely-wrinkled boots. In his pockets he was always rattling money. His round head was beginning to get

bald, but still he had many light-coloured curls, which he was always shaking in a sprightly manner. Ilia had never liked him, but now his feeling of dislike grew stronger and stronger. He knew that Petruha did not like Grandfather Jeremiah. One day he heard the barman say to Uncle Terence,—

“Terence, you must keep an eye on him. He’s a miser! I expect he has a good bit hoarded up in his pillow. Don’t lose your chance! The old mole hasn’t long to live; you’re his friend, and he has not a soul related to him. Take it to heart, my beauty.”

Old Jeremiah passed his evenings in the eating-house with Terence, talking to the hunchback about God, goodness and human life. The hunchback, living in town, had become still uglier. He looked as if he had got soaked through with his work; his eyes had grown dim and timid, his body seemed as if it had partly melted in the heat of the eating-house. His dirty shirt kept constantly riding up his hump, and when he talked to anyone he held his hands behind his back and pulled it down with a quick jerk—looking as if he were hiding something in his enormous hump.

When Grandfather Jeremiah sat in the yard, Terence used to come out on to the steps and look at him, screwing up his face and shading his eyes. His little yellow beard would quiver, and he would ask in a weak, guilty voice,—

“Grandfather Jeremiah, do you need anything?”

“Thank you. Nothing. I need nothing now,” the old man would answer, and the hunchback would turn round on his thin legs and walk away. Meantime the old man grew worse and worse every day.

“I suppose I sha’n’t get better,” said he one day to Ilia, who was sitting by his side. “I suppose the time has come for me to die. Only—”

Jeremiah looked suspiciously round and continued in a whisper,—

“It is too soon, Ilia, dear! I have not finished my work. I have not had time. The money. I’ve hoarded the money seventeen years. I wanted to gather it for the church. I wanted to build a church in my village.

It's necessary—oh! so necessary—for people to have God's churches. Our only refuge is in God. I have amassed too little, it won't be enough. And what I have I don't know what to do with. Oh Lord! teach me. But the crows are flying about and croaking, they scent something. Ilia, dear, remember, I have money. Don't say a word, but just remember."

Ilia listened to the old man's words, felt proudly conscious that an important secret had been given into his keeping, and guessed who the crows were to whom the old man had referred with so much fear and sorrow. A few days later, when he had come home from school and was undressing in his corner, Ilia heard strange sounds in Grandfather Jeremiah's den. Someone was muttering, sobbing and gasping, as if he were being choked. At intervals Ilia could distinctly hear a hissing sound.

"Sh—sh—stand off!"

The boy tried the door timidly—it was locked. Then he called out in a trembling voice,—

"Grandfather!"

From behind the door in answer he heard a hasty choking whisper,—

"Sh—sh—Lord, mercy, mercy, mercy!" And suddenly all was still. Ilia sprang away from the door, not knowing what to do, but the next instant he put his face against a chink in the partition and remained transfixed, quivering all over. The old man's tiny room was in a dim haze. The light scarcely penetrated through a small, dirty window. The snow was melting outside and Ilia could hear the drops splashing against the window-pane, and the water running from the yard into the pit under the window. He looked and saw the old man lying, chest uppermost, on his bed, waving his arms silently.

"Grandfather!" called the boy, dismally.

The old man shuddered, lifted up his head and began muttering loudly,—

"Sh—Petruha, look, God! That's for Him! that's for His church. Sh—you crows. Lord, it's your's. Yours—keep—save—mercy—mercy—mercy."

Ilia was trembling with fright, but could not move; he saw Jeremiah's black, withered hand waving helplessly in the air and menacing someone with a crooked finger.

"Look you, that's God's! don't dare!"

And then the old man pulled himself together, shivered, and suddenly sat up in bed. His white beard quivered like the wing of a flying pigeon; he stretched out his arms, and, giving someone a great push, fell on the floor.

Ilia shrieked and fled away, the hissing noise sounding in his ears, pursuing him,—

"Sh—sh!"

He rushed into the eating-house and called out breathlessly,—

"Uncle, he's dead!"

Terence gave a sigh and began stamping first with one foot then with the other, pulling down his shirt and looking at Petruha, who stood behind the bar.

"Uncle, go quick!"

"Well, what are you waiting for?" said Petruha, severely. "Get along! Peace unto his soul! He was a good old man. By the way, I'll go and have a look too. Ilia, stop a bit here—if anything should be required run and fetch me, d'you hear? Jacob, you stand behind the bar. I'll be back soon."

Petruha walked out of the eating-house leisurely, tapping loudly with his heels, and the boys heard him say behind the door,—

"Go on, go on quicker, fool's head!"

Ilia was very frightened by all that he had seen and heard, but his fright did not prevent him from noticing everything that went on around him.

"Did you see him die?" asked Jacob from behind the bar. Ilia looked at him and answered by a question,—

"Why have they gone there?"

"To see! You called them!"

Ilia was silent; then he shut his eyes tightly and said,—

"Well, it was fearful! How he pushed him!"

"Whom?" said Jacob, curiously.

"The devil!" answered Ilia, after a moment's thought.

"Did you see?"

"Eh?"

"Did you see the devil?" exclaimed Jacob in a low voice, running up to him; but his friend shut his eyes again and did not answer.

"Were you frightened?" asked Jacob, pulling him by his sleeve.

"Wait a bit!" suddenly said Ilia, mysteriously. "I—I'll run away for a minute—all right? But you won't tell your father; will you?"

"All right! And then come back here."

Excited by a sudden thought, Ilia rushed out of the eating-house and, in a few seconds, was in the cellar. Cautiously, making no sound, like a mouse, he crept up to the chink in the partition and pressed his face against it. The old man was still alive—he was gasping; but Ilia could not see him, he was lying on the floor at the feet of two black living figures, which in the dim light seemed to melt into one big, ugly shape. After a time Ilia made out his uncle, kneeling on the old man's bed, and holding the pillow, which he was hastily sewing up. He could distinctly hear the rustle of the thread being drawn through the stuff. Petruha stood behind Terence, bending over him. Suddenly he shook his curls and whispered reproachfully,—

"Be quick, you idiot! I told you to keep a needle and thread in readiness. But of course you didn't and now you've had to thread it. Oh, you duffer! You could not even look properly. Anyway, let's leave him in peace. It will be enough as it is. Do you hear? Come to your senses, you duffer!"

Petruha's whispering, the gasping sighs of the dying man, the rustle of the thread and the plaintive noise of the water running into the pit under the window, all these sounds melted together into a dull noise, that made everything confused in the boy's mind. He quietly drew away from the wall and went out of the cellar. A big black spot went round like a wheel before his eyes with a hissing noise, which made him feel faint

and sick. As he went up the steps to the eating-house, he had to take hold of the banisters tightly, and lifted his feet with difficulty; when he got to the door he stopped and began to cry softly. Jacob seemed to be dancing before his eyes and saying something. Then someone gave him a push in the back and Perfishka's voice said,—

"Who? What? Why? B-but, what—dead? Ah! d-devil!" And again giving Ilia a hard push, the shoemaker dashed down the stairs so violently that they cracked beneath his feet. At the bottom he stopped and cried out in a loud, wailing voice,—

"W-well, my!"

Ilia heard his uncle and Petruha mounting the stairs and he did not want them to see him crying, but he could not keep back his tears.

"Jacob!" cried Petruha, "run and fetch Mihei, the police-sergeant. Tell him the rag-picker has been called to his account—sharp!"

"Oh, you!" exclaimed Perfishka. "So you have been there already? M—m."

Terence walked past his nephew without looking at him. But Petruha put his hand on Ilia's shoulder and said,—

"What! crying? Well, cry away, it shows you are a grateful lad, who can appreciate the good that's done to him. The old man was a great benefactor to you."

He was silent for a moment and then, taking Ilia quietly aside, added,—

"But all the same, don't stand in the door."

Ilia wiped his face with the sleeve of his shirt and looked round. Petruha was already behind the counter, shaking his curls. In front of him stood Perfishka, smiling knowingly. But his face, in spite of the smile, looked as if he had just lost his last copeck at toss up.

"Well, what do you want, Perfishka?" asked Petruha, severely, knitting his brows.

"I? M—m. Won't there be a tip?" asked Perfishka suddenly.

"What for?" asked the barman, slowly.

"Oh, dear!" cried the shoemaker, stamping his foot. "My mouth is large enough, but the pie is not for me. So be it. One word—I wish you luck, Peter Yakimich."

"What's that? what are you jabbering about?" asked Petruha, with a pacifying smile.

"Oh, I was only speaking out of the simplicity of my heart and brain."

"I suppose you want a drink, is that what you're aiming at? He, he, he!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" echoed the pleased laugh of the shoemaker.

Ilia shook his head as if he were shaking something off, and went out.

That night he went to bed late and not in his usual corner, but in the eating-house, under the table on which Terence washed up. The hunchback put his nephew to bed and began wiping the tables. On the counter a lamp was burning, lighting up the big teapots and bottles in the cupboard. In the eating-house it was dark, the black night looked through the windows, a fine rain was falling and the wind rustled softly. Terence, looking like an enormous hedge-hog, moved the tables about and kept sighing. When he approached the lamp a dark shadow fell from him on the floor, which, it seemed to Ilia, was Grandfather Jeremiah's soul, creeping after his uncle and hissing,—
"Sh—sh!"

The boy felt cold and frightened. The damp suffocated him—it was Saturday, the floor had just been washed and was smelling of rot. He wanted to ask his uncle to lie down under the table by his side, but something seemed to have come between him and his uncle. His imagination kept calling up before his eyes the bent figure of Grandfather Jeremiah with his white beard, and in his ears the kind, grating voice resounded,—

"My son, my son! Our Lord knows what we can bear. It's all right."

"Won't you lie down?" said Ilia, losing patience at last, in a plaintive voice.

The hunchback shuddered and stood still. Then he asked timidly,—

“Who’s there?”

“I; it’s time to go to bed, I say.”

“At once! at once! at once!” the hunchback said hurriedly, and began walking rapidly about among the tables. It was clear to Ilia that his uncle was also afraid, and he said to himself, with a feeling of pleasure,

“That’s what you deserve.”

The rain was beating a tattoo on the windows and somewhere dull thuds resounded. The flame of the lamp quivered and the teapots and bottles seemed to smile silently. Ilia covered his head with his uncle’s coat and lay hardly daring to breathe. Suddenly something began to move about close to him. He grew cold with fright, uncovered his head and saw Terence kneeling down with his head bent so low that his chin touched his chest, and whispering,—

“Lord, our Father—Lord!”

His whispers sounded like Grandfather Jeremiah’s gasps. The darkness in the room seemed to move, the floor to sway with it, and the wind howled in the chimneys,—

“Uh, Uh, Uh!”

“Don’t pray!” cried Ilia in a ringing voice.

“Oh, dear! what’s the matter?” said the hunchback in a half whisper. “Go to sleep, for Christ’s sake!”

“Don’t pray!” persisted the boy.

“A-all right, I won’t.”

The darkness and damp began to oppress Ilia still more, he felt a difficulty in breathing, and a feeling of dread, of pity for the old man and of anger towards his uncle seethed in his breast. He tossed from side to side on the floor, and at last sat up and groaned.

“What’s the matter? what’s the matter?” whispered his uncle in a fright, catching hold of his hands. But Ilia pushed him away, and, with tears of pain and dread in his voice, muttered,—

“Lord! If I could hide myself somewhere—away from all—O Lord!”

Tears choked him. He drew in with difficulty a gulp of the foul air and began to sob, pressing his face against the floor.

CHAPTER VI

A GREAT change took place in Ilia's character after these events. Up till now he had kept aloof only from his schoolmates, because he could not reconcile himself to their behaviour towards him, and did not wish to give way and make friends with them; and in the eating-house he had been sociable and confiding, and the attention of grown-up people gave him pleasure. But now he began to avoid everyone, and grew serious beyond his years. A reserved expression appeared on his face, his lips were tightly compressed, he took to observing the grown-up people narrowly, and, with a provoking look in his eyes, listened to what they talked about. The remembrance of what he saw the day Grandfather Jeremiah died troubled him, and it seemed to him that he too, together with Petruha and his uncle, was guilty before the old man. Perhaps the dying man saw them robbing him, and thought that it was he, Ilia, who had told Petruha about the money. This idea gradually took possession of him, and filled his heart with consternation and pain. It was always present with him, and fostered a feeling of suspicion that he was beginning to have towards everyone. When he noticed something bad in anyone, he felt more light-hearted, as if his own sin had been diminished thereby. And much evil, indeed, did he find in men. Everyone called barman Petruha, "receiver of stolen property" and "rascal" behind his back, but to his face everyone made up to him, bowed respectfully and called him Peter Yakimich. Everyone used some bad word to Matitsa; when she was tipsy they pushed and beat her; once, when she was drunk, she sat down under the kitchen window, and the cook emptied the slops on to her head. But everyone profited by her services, giving her in return nothing

but bad language and blows. Perfishka would call her in to wash his sick wife, Petruha made her clean the eating-house before great holidays, without any payment, and Terence made her sew shirts for him. She went to everyone, did everything well, and without murmuring; she liked to nurse sick people, and liked to look after children.

Ilia saw that the person who worked most of all—the shoemaker, Perfishka—was the general laughing-stock of the yard, and that they only cared for him when he was tipsy, and sat with his harmonica in his hands in the eating-house, or walked about the yard, playing, and singing merry and funny songs. No one took any notice of him when he carefully brought out his sick wife, nor when he put his little daughter to bed, covering her with kisses, and making faces to amuse her; neither did they pay any attention when he taught Masha to cook the dinner and tidy the room, laughing and joking the while, and then sat down and worked till late at night, bending double over a torn and dirty boot.

When the smith was led away to prison, no one thought of his son except the shoemaker. He took Pashka at once, and the boy twisted and waxed his thread for him, swept his room, brought the water, and ran on errands to the shop for bread and kvass and onion. Everyone saw the shoemaker tipsy on holidays, but no one heard him talking to his wife, when sober, the next day,—

“You must forgive me, Dunia. You know I drink, not because I’m a lost drunkard, but because I’m tired. The whole week there’s nothing but work, it’s dull. Well, one takes a drink.”

“But do I blame you? O Lord! I pity you,” his wife would say in a hoarse voice, and something would rattle in her throat. “Do you think I don’t see your labour? The Lord has made me a stone round your neck. If I could only die! If I could set you free!”

“Don’t speak like that, I don’t like such talk. I hurt you, and not you me. But that isn’t because I’m bad, but because I’m weak. One day we’ll go to another

street, and everything will be different—windows, doors, everything. The windows will open into the street. We'll cut out a boot in paper and we'll stick it to the glass; that will be our sign-board. And the people will come to us. The work will start. Oh, my! We'll live well and make money."

Ilia knew Perfishka's life in all its details, knew that he struggled on, like a stranded fish, and respected him for his readiness to joke and laugh with everyone and for his splendid performance on the harmonica.

Petruha did nothing but sit behind the counter, play draughts with his acquaintances, drink tea from morning till night and abuse the waiters. Soon after Jeremiah's death he began to accustom Terence to stand behind the counter and sell, while he only walked about the yard, whistling, examining the house from all sides, and even knocking the walls with his fists.

And many more things did Ilia notice, but they were all bad and wretched, and kept pushing him more and more away from men. Sometimes the impressions and ideas with which his mind was teeming made him long to talk freely to someone; but he did not feel inclined to talk to his uncle: after Jeremiah's death something intangible but impenetrable had grown up between Ilia and his uncle, something that prevented the boy from approaching him as closely and easily as before. Jacob too could not explain things to him, living as he did apart from everything, occupied with his own thoughts.

The death of the old rag-picker had made him feel sad. He would often speak of him with a piteous face and voice.

"How dull it is! If Grandfather Jeremiah were alive he would tell us tales; nothing is better than tales. He knew good ones."

"He knew everything," Ilia would answer gloomily. One day Jacob said to his playmate mysteriously,—

"If you like I'll show you something."

"Of course I would like it."

"But first you must swear you won't tell anybody."

"By God, I won't say a word!"

"Say: let me be damned anathema."

Ilia repeated the oath, and then Jacob led him to a corner of the yard, to the old lime tree. There he took off a piece of bark, that was ingeniously fastened to the trunk, and under it there appeared a big hole in the tree. It was a big hollow that had been enlarged with a knife, and prettily decorated inside with different coloured rags and bits of paper, with lead from packets of tea and bits of foil. In the bottom of the hollow stood a small icon made of brass, and in front of it was fastened the end of a wax candle.

"Did you see?" asked Jacob, fitting in the piece of bark.

"I saw, but what's it for?"

"It's a chapel," explained Jacob. "I'll leave my room and come here quietly at night and light the candle and pray. All right?"

Ilia liked his playmate's idea, but he saw at once the danger of the device.

"And if somebody sees the light? Your father will give you a beating."

"In the night—who'll see? Everybody sleeps at night, it's quite quiet on the earth. I'm—small; in the daytime God won't hear my prayer. But at night it will be heard! It will, won't it?"

"I don't know. Perhaps He'll hear," said Ilia, thoughtfully, looking at the pale face and big eyes of his friend.

"Will you pray with me?" asked Jacob.

"What do you want to pray about?" asked Ilia at the same time. And they both smiled at each other.

"I will pray," said Ilia, "to be clever and also that I shall have everything that I wish; and you?"

"And I also."

But after a few moments' thought Jacob explained,—

"I just wanted to pray—for nothing. Just pray and nothing else. And He can do as He likes, give what He wishes. But if you want to pray so, I will too."

"All right," said Ilia.

They decided to begin praying that very night, and both lay down with the firm resolution of waking up in

the night. But they did not wake up either that night or the next or for many nights; and afterwards new impressions quite effaced the chapel from Ilia's mind.

On the same lime tree, in which Jacob had made his chapel, Pashka used to hang snares to catch greenfinches and tomtits. Pashka led a hard life; he had grown thin, his face was drawn and his eyes glanced from side to side like the eyes of a carnivorous animal. He had no time now to run about the yard; he worked the whole day long for Perfishka, and only on holidays, when the shoemaker was drunk, his playmates saw him. Pashka asked them what they learnt at school, and frowned enviously, listening to their tales, which were full of boasting and conscious superiority.

"Don't turn up your noses too high. I'll learn too."

"Perfishka won't let you."

"I'll run away," Pashka said decidedly.

And in fact, soon after this conversation, the shoemaker walked about the yard, laughing and saying,—

"Just think of my apprentice! He's run away, the little devil! The leather profession did not suit him."

It was raining that day. Ilia cast a look at untidy Perfishka, then at the grey, dull sky, and he felt sorry for his dare-devil playmate. They were both standing under the roof of the cart-shed, close against the wall, and looking at the house. It seemed to Ilia that the house was growing lower and lower, as if it were sinking into the ground with the weight of time. The old ribs of the house seemed to protrude more and more, as if all the dirt, that had accumulated during many years, was thrusting the house asunder and that it could no longer resist the pressure. Permeated with many woes, always resounding with drunken cries and bitter drunken songs, shaken and crushed by the stamping of feet on its floors—the house seemed as if it could no longer live, and was falling slowly asunder, looking piteously at God's light through its dim window-panes.

"Oh, dear!" said the shoemaker. "Soon the basket will burst and all the mushrooms will be scattered on the damp earth. We, the inhabitants, will disperse in all directions. We'll have to look for dens in other

places. When we find them we'll begin to live differently. Everything will be different—windows, doors, and even the bugs will bite differently. The sooner the better! I'm tired of this pigsty—although I'm accustomed to it—may it come to an untimely end!"

But the shoemaker's wish was in vain, the house stood firm, and was bought by the barman, Petruha. Having bought it, he walked about two whole days and touched and picked the heap of rotting wood in a pre-occupied sort of way. Bricks and boards were brought, the house was enveloped in scaffolding and groaned and shivered under the blows of axes for about three months. It was sawn and chopped, nails were knocked in, its rotten ribs were broken out in a cloud of dust, new ones were put in, and at last, having made it broader with a new outhouse, the whole was covered with thin planks. Short and broad, the house now stood straight and firm, just as if it had shot forth new roots deep into the ground. In the front, close to the roof, Petruha hung a big sign-board, on which was written in gold letters on a blue background:—

"P. Y. Filimonoff's Joyous Refuge for Friends."

"But all the same it's rotten inside," said Perfishka, one day.

Ilia heard and smiled approvingly. To him too the patched-up house seemed a fraud, and he thought of Pashka, who was living in some other place and looking out on a different scene. Ilia, like the shoemaker, had dreamt of other windows, doors and people. Now it was still worse in the house than before. The old lime tree was chopped down, and the quiet corner near it had disappeared, occupied by a new building. All the other favourite haunts, where the children had loved to talk, had disappeared also. Only where the smithy had stood, behind an enormous heap of chips and rotting wood, was a quiet corner, but Ilia found it fearful to sit there; he was always picturing to himself Savel's wife lying under that heap with a broken head.

Petruha gave Terence a new apartment, a small room next to the eating-house, into which, through the thin wooden partition, covered with green wall-paper,

penetrated all the sounds of the eating-house and the smell of vodka and the tobacco smoke. It was clean and dry, but worse than the cellar. The window opened on to the grey wall of the cart-shed, and no glimpse could be seen of the sky, or the sun, or the stars, while out of the cellar window one could see all this if one knelt.

Uncle Terence put on a lilac shirt, and on the top of that a pea-jacket, which fitted him as if it were hanging on a box, and stood behind the counter from morning till night. Now, when he talked to the men, instead of "thou" he said "you" in an abrupt, hard voice like a dog's bark, and looked at them from behind the counter like a faithful hound guarding its master's property. He bought Ilia a grey cloth jacket, boots, coat and hat, and when the boy put them all on he thought of the old rag-picker. He scarcely ever spoke to his uncle, and life went by monotonously and slowly. His mind was full of extraordinary, unchildish thoughts and feelings, a heavy weariness oppressed him. He began to think oftener of the country; he was much more sure now that life was better there; it was quieter, simpler and more comprehensible. He remembered the forests of Kerjenz, and Uncle Terence's tales about the hermit, Antipe, and the thought of Antipe awoke another—about Pashka. Where was he? Perhaps he too had run away into the forest, had dug himself a cave and lived in it. The wind moans in the forest, the wolves howl; this is terrible to listen to, yet sweet. And in the winter, in good weather, everything glistens like silver, and all is still, so still, that nothing is heard except the crunching of the snow under one's feet, and the beating of one's heart, if one stands motionless for a moment.

But in town all is noisy and obscure, even the nights are full of sound. Songs resound, shrieks for help, groans, isvoschiks pass, and the noise of the cabs and carts makes the glass shake in the windows. The boys at school pass their time in yelling and horse-play, the grown-up people shout, swear, fight and drink; and all this is not only disturbing, but even

dangerous sometimes. Everyone seems reckless, and is either a thief like Petruha, or malignant like Savel, or worth nothing at all like Perfishka, Uncle Terence, Matitsa. Ilia was especially struck by the inexplicably bad behaviour of the shoemaker.

One day, when Ilia was ready to go to school, Perfishka came into the eating-house all dishevelled, as if he had not slept, and stood silently near the counter, looking at Terence. His left eye kept quivering and screwing up, while his lower lip drooped comically. Uncle Terence glanced at him, smiled, and poured him out a glass of vodka for three copecks, Perfishka's usual portion. Perfishka took the glass with a trembling hand, emptied it into his mouth, but did not give a grunt or swear, and did not even ask anything to eat. He again began to stare at the barman with his strangely-quivering left eye, while his right one was dim, motionless, and looked as if it could not see anything.

"What's the matter with your eye?" asked Terence.

Perfishka rubbed his eye, glanced at his hand, and said distinctly,—

"My wife, Avdotia Petrovna, is dead."

"O-oh?" drawled Uncle Terence, and, glancing at the icon, crossed himself.

"Let her soul rest in heaven!"

"Ay?" asked Perfishka, staring fixedly at Terence's face.

"I say: let her soul rest in heaven."

"Yes—she's dead!" said the shoemaker, and suddenly turned and went away.

"Queer fellow!" said Uncle Terence, shaking his head dolefully. And Ilia too thought the shoemaker a queer fellow. As Ilia was going to school he entered the cellar for a minute to have a look at the body. The place was dark and crowded. The women had come from the attic, and, standing together in the corner where the bed stood, were speaking in a half whisper. Matitsa was trying on a dress for Masha, and asking, "Is it tight under the arms?"

And Masha, spreading out her arms, was saying capriciously.

"Y-y-yes!"

The shoemaker sat on the table all huddled up, and looked at his daughter with his blinking eyes. Ilia glanced at the plump white face of the dead woman, thought of her dark eyes, now closed for ever, and went off, with a heavy, painful feeling at his heart. When he came back from school and entered the eating-house, he heard Perfishka playing on his harmonica and singing in a jaunty voice,—

"Oh, my dear one,
You have taken my heart away.
Why have you taken my heart away,
And where have you thrown it?"

"Oh, dear me! The women have turned me out! 'Go away,' they cried, 'you unnatural monster! You drunken mole.' I'm not angry—I'm patient—abuse me, beat me! only let me live a little! do let me, please! Heigho! brothers! Everybody wants to live decently—that's what's the matter. Everyone's soul is the same, whether he's Vaska or Jacob!

"Who is it that's wailing there?
What d'ye want, what's ailing there?
Be still, don't bruise your head,
Nibble away at your dry bread!"

Perfishka's queer face was desperately merry. Ilia looked at him with disgust and fear. It seemed to him that God must punish the shoemaker severely for behaving in such a way on the very day his wife had died. Yet Perfishka was drunk the next day too; he stumbled after the coffin, blinking his eyes and even smiling. Everyone abused him, and one man even gave him a blow on the neck.

"This is a job for you, oho!" said Ilia to Jacob, the evening after the funeral. "What do you say of Perfishka? A regular bad lot!"

"Let him go to the dogs!" said Jacob, indifferently. Ilia had for some time noticed that Jacob was

greatly changed. He scarcely ever walked about the yard, but sat all day in his room and even seemed to shun meeting Ilia. At first Ilia thought that Jacob was beginning to feel jealous of his success at school, and stayed in the house learning his lessons; but he soon found out that Jacob's school work was not improving, the master was constantly abusing him for his absent-mindedness and inability to understand the simplest things. Jacob's attitude to Perfishka did not astonish Ilia, as he seldom paid any attention to what was going on in the house, but Ilia wanted to know what was happening to his friend, and he asked,—

"What's the matter with you? Don't you want to go on being friends with me?"

"I? don't want to be friends? What's that you're saying?" exclaimed Jacob in astonishment and began to speak hurriedly.

"I will tell you something. Go home—I'll come in a minute—I've got something to show you."

He started up and ran away, while Ilia, full of curiosity, went to his room. Jacob soon came running back. He locked the door after him, and, coming up to the window, took out of his shirt a red book.

"Come here!" he said importantly in a quiet voice, sitting down on Uncle Terence's bed and pointing to a place by his side. Then he opened his book, put it on his knees, doubled himself up over it, and, drawing his finger along the grey pages, began to read:—

"And suddenly the brave knight saw a mountain in the distance reaching to the sky, and in the middle of it an iron door. His manly heart was alight with the flame of valour, he lowered his spear and dashed forward with a loud cry, digging the spurs into his horse, and with all his mighty strength hurled his spear against the door. Then a dreadful thundering noise was heard, the iron door flew into pieces, and at the same time flame and smoke appeared out of the mountain and a mighty voice resounded, causing the earth to tremble and stones to fall from the mountain at the feet of the knight's horse. "Aha! you have come, insolent fool! I and

death have been waiting for you a long time." The knight, blinded with the smoke—"

"Who is he?" asked Ilia, amazed, as he listened to his friend's voice trembling with emotion.

"What?" answered Jacob, lifting his pale face from the book.

"What is a knight?"

"That—on horseback—with a spear, he is called Raoul the Fearless. The dragon had stolen his bride, the beautiful Louisa; but—just listen, stupid!" exclaimed Jacob, impatiently.

"Go on! go on! No, wait—what's a dragon?"

"A serpent with wings and feet, its claws are of iron, it has three heads, and they all spit out fire—you understand?"

"That's grand!" said Ilia, opening wide his eyes. "Won't it give it to him?"

"Bother you!"

Sitting close to each other, quivering with curiosity and a strange, delightful feeling of fear, the boys entered a new magic land, where great evil monsters fell under the mighty blows of brave knights, where everything was majestic, beautiful and marvellous and in no way resembled this grey, dull life. There were no drunken men, covered with tatters, and, instead of rotten wooden houses, there were palaces, shining with gold, and impregnable iron castles rose to the sky. They entered into a country rich in marvellous stories, while behind their backs the merry shoemaker, Perfishka, was playing on his harmonica and chanting quickly and distinctly:—

"If I die, it doesn't mean
I'll be taken by the fiend;
I'll get taken, while alive,
By drinking till the fiends arrive."

"Is that so, brothers? strum away, keep it up! God loves merry people!"

The harmonica was gasping forth the sounds, trying to keep up with the shoemaker's ringing voice, while he, in emulation with it, shouted out a dancing tune:—

“‘And don’t you whine, that in your youth
You had to bear the cold ;
For, when you go to hell forsooth,
You get it hot, I’m told.’”

Every verse drew forth a burst of laughter and a yell of approval. The sounds of the harmonica joined with the clash of dishes, the dull thud of boots on the floor, the noise of chairs pushed back, and all these sounds mingled together seemed like the moan of the wind in a wintry forest.

Meanwhile, in a dirty hole, divided from this storm of sounds by thin boards, two boys were bending low over a book, and one of them was whispering :—

“‘Then the knight hugged the monster in an iron clasp and it roared in a voice of thunder from pain and terror.’”

CHAPTER VII

WHEN the book about the knight and dragon was finished, there appeared *Guak, the Story of Invincible Faithfulness*, then *The Tale of the Brave Prince Francis the Venetian and the Lovely Queen Rentzinvin*, and the impressions of real life were replaced in Ilia's mind by knights and ladies. The friends stole in turns twenty copeck coins from the counter, and thus they had plenty of books. They became acquainted with the adventures of *Yashka Smertenski*, were enraptured with *Yapancha, the Tartar Horseman*, and drifted further and further away from their hard, ugly life into the land where men always destroyed the cruel snares of fate and were happy. They lived like this for many days, and during the whole time only one event made an impression upon Ilia.

One day Perfishka was summoned by the police. He went off full of anxiety, but came back joyous, holding Pashka Gratchoff tightly by the hand. Pashka was just as sharp-eyed as before, but had grown dreadfully thin and yellow and his face was less insolent. The shoemaker brought him into the eating-house and began speaking, winking his eyes convulsively all the time.

"Here you see, good people, Paul Gratchoff himself, who has arrived from Pensa, escorted by the police. That's the sort of people who come into the world nowadays. They don't sit near the stove and wait for luck to come to them, but, as soon as they get up on their hind legs, go off themselves to search for their luck!"

Pashka stood by his side with one hand in the pocket of his torn trousers, while he was trying to pull out the other from the shoemaker's grip, sending surly side glances at him. Someone advised Perfishka to give

Pashka a thrashing, but the shoemaker answered gravely,—

“What for? Let him wander about, perhaps he’ll find his luck.”

“But I suppose he must be hungry,” suggested Terence, and, giving the boy a piece of bread, added, ‘Here, Pashka!’”

The boy took the bread leisurely and went out of the eating-house.

“Phew!” whistled the shoemaker after him. “He’s gone again! Good-bye, tender creature!”

Ilia, who had observed the whole scene from the door of his room, beckoned to him, but before going in Pashka stopped for a second, and, as he entered, looked round suspiciously, and asked abruptly in a surly voice,—

“What do you want?”

“Good-morning!”

“Well, good-morning!”

“Sit down.”

“What for?”

“Just so, let’s talk.”

Ilia felt disconcerted by Gratchoff’s short, angry questions and by his rather hoarse, harsh voice. He wanted to ask Pashka where he had been the whole summer and what he had seen. But Pashka seated himself on a chair and, with a decided air, biting into his bread, began himself to ask questions.

“Have you finished learning?”

“I shall finish in the spring.”

“And I have finished already.”

“Indeed!” exclaimed Ilia, incredulously.

“What’s the matter? Everything goes quickly with me.”

“But where did you learn?”

“In prison, with the convicts.”

Ilia came up to him closer, and, looking into his thin face with respect, asked,—

“Were you a long time there? Were you afraid?”

“There’s nothing to be afraid of! I was there four months. You know, I have been in many prisons in

different towns. My fine fellow! I stuck to the gents there. There were ladies too—real ladies and gentlemen. They speak in different languages and know everything. I tidied up their cells! They were jolly people, the devils, although they were convicts!”

“Robbers?”

“Real thieves,” said Pashka, proudly. Ilia blinked his eyes and felt a still greater respect for Pashka.

“Were they Russians?” he asked.

“Some of them were Jews. People of the best sort. Oh! what people they were, my good fellow! They robbed in the proper fashion! Well, they were caught and sent to Siberia.”

“How did you learn?”

“Oh! I said: teach me, and they taught me.”

“To read and write?”

“To write a little! But as for reading—I can read as much as you like! I have read a great many books.”

The conversation, turning to books, brightened Ilia up.

“I and Jacob read too. Such books!”

Then they began to name the books they had read, outbidding each other. Soon Pashka said, with a sigh,—

“Y—yes, you devils, you have read more. And your books are better. While I’ve been reading verse. They had lots of books, but the good ones were only in verse.” Then Jacob entered, fixed his eyes on Pashka in astonishment and laughed.

“Sheep!” Pashka greeted him, “what are you laughing at?”

“Nothing. Where have you been?”

“Where you’ll never get to.”

“Do you know,” said Ilia to his friend, “he also has been reading books.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Jacob, and at once began to speak to Pashka in a more friendly way. The three boys sat down side by side, and a hurried, disconnected but wonderfully engrossing conversation took place.

“I’ve seen such things—it’s impossible to tell you!” Pashka was saying, full of excitement and pride. “Once

I had nothing to eat for two days—nothing at all! I slept in a forest—all alone.”

“Were you frightened?” asked Jacob.

“Go and spend a night there—you’ll know! Once I was almost bitten to death by dogs. I was in Kazan. There is a monument there to someone, it was put up for the poetry he had written. He was a big man—his feet were so big! And his fist as big as your head, Jacob! I too, you fellows, am going to write poetry; I have already learnt to a little.”

He suddenly shrank together, drew up his legs, and, looking fixedly at one spot, frowning and important, began hurriedly :—

“‘People are moving along the street,
They are all well dressed and satisfied.
But if you ask them for something to eat,
They will just say to you—get away!’”

He finished, glanced at the boys and quietly bent his head. For a minute there was an awkward silence. Then Ilia asked cautiously,—

“But is that verse?”

“Don’t you hear?” cried Pashka, angrily. “I said : eat and street—that means it’s verse.”

“Of course it’s verse!” exclaimed Jacob, hurriedly. “You always catch up a fellow’s words, Ilia.”

“I have written some more,” said Pashka, with animation, to Jacob, and again burst forth hurriedly :—

“‘The clouds are grey—the earth damp to the core
Autumn tide is at the door.
I am houseless and forlorn,
All my clothes are tattered and torn.’”

“O-o-oh!” drawled Jacob, opening wide his eyes.

“That’s real poetry!” confirmed Ilia.

Pashka coloured slightly and screwed his eyes up, just as if smoke had got into them.

“I shall write long pieces of poetry,” he boasted. “It is not very difficult. You walk along and see the sky—skies, fly—flies! Or else wood—food. Verse comes of its own accord.”

"And what are you going to do now?" asked Ilia.

Pashka winked his eyes, looked round, was silent for a moment, and at last said in a hesitating way,—
"Something or other!"

But the same instant he added decidedly,—

"And afterwards—I'll run away again."

In the meantime he lived with the shoemaker, and every day the children came to see him. In the cellar it was quieter and better than in Terence's hole. Perfishka was rarely at home—he had spent in drink everything that he had, and now he went to other workshops to work by the day, and, if he could not find work, sat in the eating-house. He was half-clad, and barefooted, but always carried his beloved old harmonica under his arm. It seemed to have grown part of his body, while he had put into it a bit of his merry soul, and they had begun to resemble each other—both were worn, angular, and full of provoking songs and trills. All the tradesmen of the town knew Perfishka as an inexhaustible composer of boisterous and comic songs, dances and by-words, and he was a welcome guest in every work-shop. Everyone loved him for his skill in lightening the heavy, dismal life of work-people by his gay songs and quaint, comic stories.

When he was able to earn a few copecks he used to give half to his daughter—and there his solicitude for her ended. She was the sole mistress of her destiny. She had grown very much, her black curls reached to her shoulders, her dark eyes had grown larger and wore a more serious expression, her form was slight and supple, and she played her part as mistress of her little hole very well. She used to gather chips of wood from places where buildings were going on, tried to cook some kind of porridge, and till noon walked about with her skirt tucked up, all covered with soot, wet and pre-occupied. But, having cooked her dinner, she tidied up the room, washed herself, put on a clean dress and sat down at the table near the window to mend her clothes. While drawing her tatters together with her needle, she sang songs and—gay and bright—looked like a tomtit in its cage.

Matitsa often came to see her and brought bread, tea and sugar, and once she even gave Masha a light blue dress. Masha behaved towards her like a grown-up person and the mistress of her house; she would put the small iron samovar to boil, give Matitsa tea, and, sipping the hot and pleasant beverage, talked about all sorts of things and abused Perfishka.

Matitsa abused him with enthusiasm, Masha responded in a high voice, but without any anger, and as if she were speaking out of politeness as mistress of the house. In everything she said about her father one could detect an indulgent note.

"Of course, if a man drinks little good one gets out of him," she would say. "But then he likes to be merry. He drinks to get merry. When mother was alive he did not drink so much."

"May his life dry up," droned Matitsa, knitting her brows viciously. "What of it? Has he forgotten, the drunkard, that he has a child left? Disgusting mole, may he spew his soul out like a dog!"

"He knows I'm a big girl and can do everything myself," said Masha.

"Lord, O Lord!" sighed Matitsa, heavily. "What's this taking place on our earth? What will the girl become? I had a little girl, like you. She was left at home, in the town of Horol. It is such a long way off, this town of Horol, that if I were allowed to go, I would not be able to find the road there. That's what happens to people. One lives and lives on the earth and forgets even where his birthplace is."

Masha liked to listen to the thick voice of this woman with her big face and eyes like a cow; and although Matitsa always smelt of vodka, it did not hinder Masha from climbing into her lap, pressing herself against her big breast, which projected like a small hillock, and kissing the thick lips of her well-cut mouth. Matitsa used to come in the morning, while the children assembled in the evening. They played cards—"pools," "miller," "your own trumps"—but more often read. Masha listened with great interest to what they read, and in the most exciting places called

out softly. Jacob was even more attentive to the girl than before. He was always bringing her pieces of bread and meat, tea, sugar, kerosene in beer bottles, and sometimes gave her the money that was left over from the purchase of books. He had grown accustomed to doing all this and thought nothing of it; Masha regarded all his care as something quite ordinary, and paid no particular attention to it.

"Jacob," she would say, "I have no more coal."

"All right."

And in a short time he would either bring her coals, or else give her seven copecks, saying,—

"Go and buy some. I could not steal any."

He brought Masha a slate and began teaching her in the evenings. Their studies progressed slowly, but still in two months' time Masha could name and write down on her slate all the letters of the alphabet.

Ilia too had grown accustomed to this friendship, and in the yard no one seemed to notice them. Sometimes Ilia in his turn would steal something from the kitchen or pantry to oblige his friend and would bring it to the shoemaker's cellar. He was fond of the slim, dark girl, who was an orphan like himself, and he admired her because she knew how to live alone, and do things like a grown-up person. He liked to see her laughing and was always trying to make her; and when he did not succeed, he used to get angry and tease,

"Dirty slut."

And she would screw up her eyes and say,—

"Large cheekboned devil."

Sometimes they quarrelled seriously: Masha got angry very soon and rushed at Ilia, meaning to scratch him, but he, with a derisive laugh, would run away from her.

Once, at cards, he detected Masha in cheating and cried out furiously,—

"Jacob's mistress."

And then he added another filthy word, the meaning of which he understood already. Jacob was present at the time. At first he laughed, but seeing his girl-friend's face distorted with anger at the insult and her eyes full

of tears, he stopped, grew pale, and suddenly jumping up from his chair, dashed at Ilia, gave him a blow on the nose, and, catching him by the hair, threw him to the ground. It happened so quickly that Ilia had no time to defend himself; and when, blinded with pain and anger, he picked himself up from the floor, and, with lowered head, was going for Jacob like a bull, calling out,—

“Hold steady! I’ll give—”

He stopped, seeing Jacob crying piteously, leaning against the table, while Masha stood by his side and was saying with tears in her eyes,—

“Don’t be friends with him. He’s vile. He’s spiteful. They’re all vicious—his father is a convict, and his uncle is a hunchback. He’ll have a hump too. Vile boy,” and, approaching Ilia bravely, she cried out, “Scurvy rubbish, soul of a rag-picker! Here, come on. Come on. What a scratching your face will get. Just you come on.”

But Ilia did not go nearer. He felt bad when he saw Jacob, whom he did not want to offend, crying, and he was ashamed to fight with a girl. She was ready to fight, that he saw clearly. He walked out of the cellar without saying a word, and paced the yard for a long time, feeling angry and miserable. At last, approaching Perfishka’s window, he looked stealthily in. Jacob and his friend were again playing at cards. Masha, covering half her face with her cards in a fan, was laughing, while Jacob was looking at his cards and first took hold of one and then of another in a hesitating way. Ilia felt sad. He walked about the yard for a short time longer and then went bravely into the cellar.

“Take me in,” he said, approaching the table.

His heart was beating fast, his face was flushed and his eyes were cast down. Jacob and Masha were silent.

“I won’t use bad language again. By God! I won’t,” said Ilia, glancing at them.

“All right, sit down—you,” said Masha.

And Jacob added severely,—

“You fool. You are no longer a little boy. Think another time what you are saying.”

"No, we are all little ones still," replied Masha to Jacob, bringing her fist down on the table, "that's why we must not use vile words."

"But how you pitched into me," said Ilia, reproachfully.

"For a good reason. Don't yelp," threw in Masha, reasonably, but in an angry voice.

"Oh, all right. I'm not angry. I'm to blame," admitted Ilia, and smiled at Jacob in a disconcerted way. "And you—don't be angry either. All right?"

"All right, take some cards."

"Wild devil," said Masha, and that ended it.

In a minute, Ilia, with knitted brows, was engrossed in the game. He seated himself opposite Masha; and was very pleased when she lost; during the whole game he tried his utmost to make her do so; but the girl played well, and it was Jacob who was generally the loser.

"Oh, you goggle-eyes," Masha used to say, with kindly commiseration, "again you're the fool."

"To the deuce with these cards. I'm tired of them. Let's go on reading *The Kamchadalka*!"

Then they got out the tattered and dirty book and read about the troubles of the unhappy and enamoured "Kamchadalka."

When Gratchoff got to know what went on, he said in the tone of an experienced man,—

"Why, you devils, you do have a good time," and he looked at Jacob and Masha with a smile, but added seriously,—

"Keep on living like this! And afterwards, you, Jacob, marry Masha, there."

"Fool," said Masha, with a smile, and they all four laughed.

When they got to the end of a book or were tired of reading, Pashka would tell them about his adventures, and his tales were not less interesting than the books.

"When I found out, brothers, that I could not get anywhere without a passport, I began to use cunning. If I saw a police-sergeant I would begin at once to walk fast, as if somebody had sent me on an errand, or

else I'd keep near some peasant, so as to make believe he was my master, or father, or somebody. The policeman would give a look and leave me in peace, he did not catch hold of me. It's all right in villages, there are no police-sergeants there; only old men and women, and children, while all the others are away in the fields. They ask: Who are you? A beggar. Whom do you belong to? Nobody. Where have you come from? From town. And that's all. They give you good food and drink. You walk about as you like; if you want to, you can run, or, if the fancy takes you, you can crawl along on your belly. Everywhere there are fields, woods, larks singing, you get a longing to be able to fly up to them. If you are not hungry, you wish for nothing but to walk on to the very end of the earth. It's just as if somebody were pulling you along like a mother carrying her child. Sometimes I was very hungry—phew! my very intestines crackled, my belly was so parched. I could almost have eaten the earth. My head swam. But when I did succeed in getting some bread and bit into it—uh! I wanted to go on eating day and night. It was good. But all the same, when I got into prison I felt glad. I was frightened at first, but afterwards it was jolly. I was very much afraid of the police-sergeants. I thought one of them would seize me, and if he once began beating me would beat me to death. But he came up to me quietly from behind and clutched me by the collar. I was standing near a shop and looking at watches. There were lots of watches—gold and all sorts. He pounced upon me. I began to holloa out. But he asked me kindly: 'Who are you? where have you come from?' Well, I told him; all the same he would have found out, they know everything. Well, he took me to the police-office. There were a great many gentlemen there. Where were you going? Travelling! They laughed. Then I was put into prison. There everybody laughed too. And afterwards they made use of me. They were devils! oh, oh!"

He talked about gentlemen in ejaculations—apparently they had made a great impression upon him, but

their figures had grown indistinct in his memory and had melted together into one big hazy effect. After staying with the shoemaker for about a month, Pashka again disappeared. Afterwards Perfishka learnt that he had entered a printing-office and was living in the town, but a long way off. Hearing about this, Ilia sighed enviously and said to Jacob,—

“I suppose it will be our lot to pass our whole lives here.”

CHAPTER VIII

THE first days after Pashka's disappearance, Ilia seemed to miss something, but after a time he plunged again into the land of marvels which had nothing to do with this world. The reading of books continued, and his soul sank into a peaceful condition of semi-drowsiness. He had a rough and sudden awakening. While he still went to school, he heard his uncle say,—

"Soon you'll be done learning, you'll be fourteen. We must look out for a situation."

"We'll find one!" exclaimed Petruha. "Knowing so many people, it's very simple. Jacob, here, does not need any situation, a place is ready for him. He can dangle about for another year, and then behind the counter he must go! And for you, Terence, I'll open another eating-house, somewhere in the vicinity. You will only have to give account to me, otherwise you'll be as if you were your own master. Y-yes, I can thank the Lord, He has taken care of me."

These words reached Ilia through a haze, they did not connect themselves with anything that occupied him at the present moment, and did not arouse any thoughts. But one morning his uncle woke him up, saying,—

"Wash yourself properly and be quick."

"Where must I go?" asked Ilia, half asleep.

"To your new situation. Thank God! we've found one. You are going to serve at a fishmonger's."

Ilia's heart sank within him with an unpleasant foreboding. His wish to leave this house where he knew everyone and had grown accustomed to everything, suddenly disappeared, and this room which he used to dislike seemed all at once to be clean and light. Sitting

on his bed, he looked at the floor and did not feel any inclination to dress. Jacob came in, gloomy and dishevelled, bent his head on one side, and glancing casually at his friend, said,—

"Make haste, father's waiting. You will come here sometimes, won't you?"

"Yes"

"That's all right. Step in to Masha and say good-bye."

"I suppose I'm not going away for ever," said Ilia, angrily. But Masha came herself, she stopped in the doorway, and, looking at Ilia, said sorrowfully,—

"So this means good-bye!"

Ilia swore, and pulled angrily at his jacket, which he was putting on; Masha and Jacob, both together, sighed deeply.

"You'll come and see us," said Jacob.

"All right," answered Ilia, gloomily.

"See how he's turning up his nose, the shopman," remarked Masha.

"You—fo-o-ol," quietly and reproachfully answered Ilia.

In a few minutes he was walking along the street with Petruha, who was smartly dressed in a long overcoat and creaking boots, and was saying impressively,—

"I am taking you to serve a man who is highly esteemed by the whole town, Kiril Ivanovich Stroganoff. He has received several medals for his kindness and good deeds; he is a member of the town council, and perhaps he will be elected head of the town. Serve him truly and faithfully and he will make a man of you. You're a serious boy, not full of mischief. And it's just as easy for him to be a benefactor to you as to spit on the ground."

Ilia listened and tried to picture to himself, this merchant, Stroganoff. Somehow it seemed to him that this merchant must be like Grandfather Jeremiah—just as thin and kind and pleasant; but when he came to the shop he saw behind the counter a tall man with an enormous stomach. He had no hair on his head, but all his face, from eyes to neck, was covered

with a thick red beard. His eyebrows, too, were thick and red, and underneath them danced angry little green eyes.

"Bow to him," whispered Petruha to Ilia, indicating the red-haired man with his eyes. Ilia, disappointed, lowered his head.

"What's he called?" droned forth a deep bass.

"Ilia," answered Petruha.

"Well, Ilia, look about you with both eyes, but see with three. Now you have nobody but your master; neither relations, nor friends—do you understand? I'm your father and mother, and you'll get no more explanations from me."

Ilia looked round the shop from under his eyelashes. In baskets with ice lay enormous flat fish and sturgeons; on shelves dried sand fish and carps were placed in piles, and tins glistened everywhere. A strong smell of brine pervaded the atmosphere and the shop was stuffy, crowded and damp. On the floor, in big tanks, live fish swam about calmly and noiselessly—sterlets, eels, perches and roaches. One small pike was darting about in a saucy way, pushing the other fishes and splashing the water on to the floor with powerful strokes of its tail. Ilia felt sorry for it. One of the shopmen—a short and stout man with round eyes and a hooked nose, resembling a brown owl, made Ilia pick the dead fish out of the tanks. Ilia rolled up his sleeves and began catching hold of the fish anywhere.

"Take hold of them by their heads, blockhead!" said the shopman under his breath. Sometimes Ilia caught hold of a live fish, which was lying motionless by mistake, and it would slip through his fingers and, wriggling convulsively, push its head against the sides of the tank.

"Look sharp!" ordered the shopman.

Ilia pricked his finger with a fin-bone, and, putting it into his mouth, began sucking it.

"Take your finger out of your mouth!" cried the proprietor in a deep voice.

Then the boy was given a big, heavy axe and ordered to go down into the cellar to break up the ice,

so that it should lie evenly. Bits of ice jumped into his face and got inside his collar; the cellar was cold and dark; and the axe, if he were not careful, caught against the ceiling. In a few minutes Ilia, dripping wet, came up from the cellar and said to the proprietor,—

“I’ve broken some jar or other down there.”

The proprietor looked at him attentively and said,—

“I forgive you for this first time. I forgive you because you owned up yourself. The next time I’ll pull your ears.”

And Ilia began to go the daily round imperceptibly and monotonously, like a small screw in a big and noisy machine. He got up at five o’clock in the morning and cleaned his master’s boots, and the boots of all the members of the family and shopmen, then went into the shop, swept it out, and washed the tables and scales. When customers entered, he got down the goods, carried out the parcels, and went home to dinner. After dinner he had nothing to do, and, if he were not sent anywhere, he stood at the door of the shop, looking out at the bustling market-place, and thinking what lots of people there are in the world and what quantities of fish, meat and vegetables they eat. One day he said to the shopman who resembled a brown owl,—

“Michael Ignatich!”

“Well?”

“What will people eat when all the fish are caught and all the cattle slaughtered?”

“Fool!” answered the shopman.

Another time he took the newspaper from off the counter, and, standing in the door, began to read it. But the shopman snatched it out of his hands, gave him a rap on the nose, and said threateningly,—

“Who gave you permission, eh? Donkey.”

Ilia did not like this shopman. When he spoke to the proprietor he added to almost every word a deferential hissing sound, but behind his back called Stroganoff a swindler, hypocrite and red-haired devil. On Saturdays and the days before holidays the proprietor of the shop went to evening service, and then the shopman’s wife or sister came and he would send

home a bag of fish, or some caviare, or conserves. He liked to make sport of beggars, many of whom were old men, and reminded Ilia of Grandfather Jeremiah. When an old man approached the door of the shop and, bowing low, asked for alms in a low voice, the shopman would take a small fish by its head and poke it into the beggar's hand in such a way as to make the fins stick into the soft part of his palm. And when the beggar, starting with pain, pulled back his hand, the shopman would call out, with a sneer,—

"Oh! don't you want it? It's not enough, is it? Be off."

One day an old beggar woman quietly took a dried sand fish and hid it in her rags; the shopman saw her and, catching hold of her by the collar, took the stolen fish away, and, bending her head downwards, gave her a blow in the face from underneath with his right hand. She did not groan or say a word, but went away in silence with her head bent down, and Ilia saw two streams of dark blood trickle from her injured nose.

"Did you get it that time?" called out the shopman after her. And, turning to the other shopman, "Carp," he said, "I hate beggars! Lazy creatures! They go about begging and get fed! And they live well too. Brothers of Christ, they are called. And what am I to Christ? A stranger? My whole life long I have to wriggle, like a worm in the sun, and get neither peace nor esteem for my pains."

The other shopman, Carp, was a religious man. He talked continually about churches, choirs, and services conducted by bishops, and every Saturday was tormented by the thought that he would be late for evening service. He also took great interest in conjurer's tricks, and every time that a magician and sorcerer appeared in the town Carp went to see him. He was a tall man, spare and very adroit; when the shop was full of customers, he wriggled amongst them like a snake, smiling and talking to everyone and glancing every now and then at his master, as if he were boasting of his skill in doing business. He was scornful and sarcastic to Ilia, and the boy did not like

him. But Ilia liked the proprietor. From morning till night the merchant stood behind the counter, opening the drawer and flinging in money. Ilia saw that he did it quite indifferently, without any eagerness, and somehow this pleased Ilia. It was gratifying, too, that the master talked to him more often and more kindly than to the other shopmen. When it was quiet and there were no customers the merchant would sometimes turn to Ilia, who was standing despondently in the door, and say,—

"Hullo, Ilia, are you asleep?"

"No."

"That's all right. But why are you always so grave?"

"I don't know."

"D'you feel dull, eh?"

"Y-yes."

"All right, feel a bit dull! I too have felt dull in my time. From the age of nine to thirty I was dull at the mercy of strangers. And now—for twenty-three years I have been looking at other people who feel dull."

And he shook his head as if he were saying,—

"There's nothing else to do!"

After two or three such conversations Ilia began to ask himself: why does this rich, highly-esteemed man remain the whole day long in a dirty shop and inhale the sour, penetrating smell of salt fish, when he has such a big, clean house? It was a strange house; everything in it was severe and quiet, everything went on in steady order; and yet there was not enough space, although both floors were occupied solely by the master, his wife and three children, their cook, who was also housemaid, and the house-porter, who acted as coachman. Everyone spoke in a subdued voice, and when crossing the enormous, clean yard kept to one side, as if afraid to appear in the broad, open space. Comparing this quiet, staid house with Petruha's, Ilia suddenly came to the conclusion that it was better to live in Petruha's house, although it was poor and noisy and dirty. This idea astonished him and he did not

want to believe it, but it kept persistently returning. And the fact that the master himself did not live at home confirmed it. The boy wanted very much to ask the merchant: why did he bother himself passing the whole day in the noise and bustle of the marketplace, instead of staying at home, where it was so quiet and peaceful? One day, when Carp had gone away for something, and Michael was in the cellar picking out the spoiled fish to send to an almshouse, the master began talking to Ilia, and the boy suddenly asked him,—

“Is it not time for you, Kiril Ivanovich, to give up your business? You are rich already. At your home it is nice, while here it is smelly and dull.”

Stroganoff looked at him sharply, leaning over the counter, his red eyebrows quivering.

“Well?” he asked, when Ilia stopped. “Have you said all?”

“Yes,” responded Ilia, taken aback, and with fear in his heart.

“Come here!”

Ilia came up. The merchant took him by the chin, lifted his head up, and, looking at him with screwed up eyes, asked,—

“Did someone tell you to say that, or did you think of it yourself?”

“By God! I thought of it myself.”

“M-yes. If it was you, all right. Well, I’ll tell you this, with me your master—you understand?—your master! you must not dare to speak like that again! Remember! Go back to your place.”

When Carp came back, the master all of a sudden began to speak, addressing himself to the shopman, but glancing sideways at Ilia to attract his attention.

“A man must do something all his life—all his life! It is only a fool who does not understand that. How can anyone live idly, doing nothing? There’s no sense in a person who is not devoted to his work.”

“That’s quite true, Kiril Ivanovich,” responded the shopman, and looked round the shop attentively, as if

he were searching for something to do. Ilia glanced at his master and began musing. His life grew duller and duller among these people. The days dragged along, one after the other, like long grey threads that were unwinding from an enormous and invisible ball, and it seemed to the boy that there would be no end to these days, and that he would have to pass his whole life standing at the door and listening to the din of the market-place. His mind, however, stimulated by the impressions he had received from his former life, and the books he had read, did not succumb to the dulling influence of the monotony of his present life, but worked incessantly, though quietly. It received impressions, which simmered in his brain and gradually filled his head with hazy judgments on everything that happened before his eyes. He had no one to talk to, nor to tell his thoughts to, and was obliged to keep them to himself. They were numerous and burdened him with their obscurity, melting together, swallowing each other up, and weighing heavily upon him. Sometimes they became so oppressive that he longed to shut his eyes and go away somewhere, far away—further than Pashka Gratchoff had gone—to go and never come back to this grey dulness and incomprehensible bustle.

On holidays he was sent to church, and he used to return feeling as if his heart had been washed with a fragrant, warm liquid. During a half year of service he was allowed to go and see his uncle only twice. Everything in the eating-house remained unchanged except that the hunchback grew thinner, while Petruha whistled louder and louder, and his face was turning from pink to red. Jacob complained that his father persecuted him.

"He keeps worrying me. 'You must work,' says he, 'I don't want a bookworm.' But if it's hateful to me to stand behind the counter? Nothing but noise, bustle, howl, roar, one can't hear oneself speak! I say to him: 'Place me as a shopkeeper to someone else. For instance in a shop where holy pictures are sold. Few customers come in, and I like holy pictures.'"

Jacob's eyes blinked sadly, the skin on his forehead had grown yellow and shone like the bald place on his father's head.

"Do you still read books?" asked Ilia.

"Why, yes, that's my only pleasure. While one is reading one seems to be living in another town, and when one leaves off it's just like tumbling from a bell-tower."

Ilia looked at him and said,—

"How old you have grown. And where is Masha?"

"She has gone to the poorhouse for alms. I can't help her much now; my father keeps an eye upon me. And Perfishka has been ill all this time. So Masha goes to the poorhouse, they give her cabbage soup and things—Matitsa helps too—Masha struggles hard."

"It's dull here too," said Ilia, thoughtfully.

"Do you feel very dull?"

"Deadly! You have books at least, while we have only one book in the whole house, *The Latest Conjuror and Sorcerer*, which the shopman keeps in his box, and which I can't get to read, he won't give it me, the rascal. Apparently, we've begun a poor life, Jacob."

"A poor one, brother."

They talked a little longer, and said good-bye to each other, both sad and pensive.

CHAPTER IX

SEVERAL weeks passed by, and then suddenly fate smiled on Ilia, roughly, but nevertheless kindly. One morning when business was at its height, the master, standing behind the counter, hastily began to turn over everything that was on it. His forehead became red with the blood mounting to his head, and the veins stood out on his neck.

"Ilia," he shouted, "just look on the floor, and see if you can find a ten-rouble note lying anywhere?"

Ilia glanced at the merchant, gave a hurried look on the floor, and answered calmly,—

"There's nothing."

"I tell you, look properly," snapped the proprietor, sharply, in his deep voice.

"But I looked."

"M-m! all right, you stubborn rogue," said the master, threateningly.

And when the customers had all gone, he called Ilia up, and catching hold of his ear with his strong, thick fingers, began pulling it from side to side, saying in a growling voice,—

"If you're told to look, you must look—if you're told to look, you must look."

Ilia put both hands against his master's belly, gave a strong push, got his ear loose, and, quivering from head to foot with the insult, cried out in an angry voice,—

"What are you angry with me for? Michael Ignatich took the money—yes! It's in his left pocket, in his waistcoat."

The shopman's owlsh face was transfixed with astonishment, and suddenly putting out his right hand he gave Ilia a blow on the ear. The boy jumped back

and fell with a groan; then, bursting into tears, he crawled along the floor to a corner of the shop. As in a dream he heard his master roar,—

"Stop! where are you off to? Give me the money."

"He lied," sounded the shopman's shrill voice.

"Come here!"

"By God!"

"I'll throw a weight at your head."

"Kiril Ivanovich—it's mine—may I burst."

"Hold your tongue!"

All was still. The master went to his room, and the loud slamming of the wooden desk in the counting-house was heard. Ilia, holding his head with his hands, sat on the floor and looked with hatred at the shopman, who stood in another corner of the shop and watched the boy with a nasty expression in his eyes.

"Well, you rascal, did I give it you nicely?" asked he in a low voice, showing his teeth.

Ilia shrugged his shoulders and was silent.

"And I'll give you some more in a minute—something to remember."

The shopman went at the boy leisurely with his round, angry eyes fixed on his face, but Ilia got upon his legs, and, taking up from the counter a long, thin knife, said in a decided manner,—

"Come on!"

The shopman stopped, measuring with his eyes the square-built, strong figure with its long arms and the knife in one of its hands, and drawled disdainfully,—

"Ah! you convict's offspring!"

"Well, come on, come on!" repeated the boy, making a step to meet him. Everything whirled and danced before Ilia's eyes, and he felt within him some great force which was pushing him fearlessly on.

"Throw down that knife!" sounded the master's voice. Ilia started, glanced at the red beard and blood-shot face, but did not move.

"I say, put down that knife!" said the master, more quietly. Ilia, with a mist before his eyes, put the knife down on the counter, gave a loud sob, and sat down on

the floor again. His head swam and ached, his ear galled him, he was suffocated by a feeling of intense weariness, which had suddenly overwhelmed him, it prevented his heart from beating regularly, and rising slowly in his throat hindered him from speaking.

His master's voice reached him from somewhere far away.

"Take your wages, Mishka."

"If you please—"

"Be off! else I'll call in the police."

"All right! I'll go away. But keep an eye on this boy, I advise you. He took up a knife—ha, ha! His father is a convict—ha, ha!"

"Be off!"

And once more all was still in the shop. Ilia looked up with a disagreeable sensation; it seemed to him that something was creeping down his face. He touched his cheek with his hand, wiped the tears away, and saw his master looking at him from behind the counter in a sharp, penetrating way. He got up and went with unsteady gait to his place at the door.

"Stop, wait a bit!" said his master. "Would you have given him a thrust with your knife?"

"Yes, I'd have given him a thrust with it," answered the boy, quietly but determinedly.

"So. What was your father sent to Siberia for—murder?"

"Arson."

"Well, that's bad enough too."

Then Carp came in, seated himself meekly by the door on a stool and began looking into the street.

"Carp, dear!" said the master, looking at him, with a sneer, "I've discharged Michael."

"As you please!"

"He had taken to stealing, ay?"

"Oh, my! exclaimed Carp, softly, in a frightened voice. "Is that possible? really?"

The master's red beard quivered with a sneer, and he began shaking with laughter behind the counter.

"Ho, ho, ho! Oh! Carp, dear, what a hypocrite you are! You poor soul."

Then he suddenly stopped laughing, sighed deeply, and said sternly and thoughtfully,—

"Oh, you people, you people! All of you must needs live and satisfy your hunger, and each of you wants to feed better and sweeter than his neighbour."

He nodded his head and was silent.

And Ilia, standing near the counter, felt injured that his master did not pay any more attention to him.

"Well, Ilia," said the merchant, after a long and impressive silence, "let's have a talk. First of all tell me—did you notice that Michael stole before?"

"Yes, he stole of everything—fish and all."

"And why did you not tell me before?"

"So," answered Ilia, after a moment's thought.

"Were you afraid to?"

"No, I wasn't."

"So. Well, why did you not say to me: 'Master, you are being robbed'?"

"I don't know. I did not want to."

"H'm. That means you told me now because you were angry?"

"Yes," answered Ilia, firmly.

"So that's the sort you are, is it?" exclaimed the master. And he stroked his red beard for a long time without saying a word and observing Ilia thoughtfully.

"Well, and you, Ilia, did you ever steal?"

"No."

"I believe you; you did not steal. Well, and Carp, this Carp here, does he steal?"

"He steals! like an echo," responded the boy.

Carp looked at him with astonishment, blinked his eyes and turned away calmly, as if it did not concern him in the least. The master knitted his brows gloomily and again began to stroke his beard. Ilia felt that something strange was going on and waited impatiently for the end. In the smelly shop nothing was to be heard but the flies buzzing about and the quiet splash of the water in the tanks of live fish.

"Carp, dear!" called out the merchant to the shopman, who was looking attentively and without moving at the street.

"What do you want?" repounded Carp, coming up to the merchant hastily, and looking into his face with a respectful and affable expression in his eyes.

"Did you hear what was said about you?" asked Stroganoff, with a sneer.

"Yes, I heard."

"Well, and what have you to say to it?"

"Nothing," said Carp, shrugging his shoulders.

"How—nothing?"

"It is quite simple, Kiril Ivanovich. I, Kiril Ivanovich, have my dignity, being a man who respects himself, and for that reason it does not become me to take offence at a boy. As you can see yourself, the boy is utterly stupid and has no manners, and I can forgive him completely for his impertinence."

"Stop a bit. Don't talk me down! but just answer: Did he say the truth or not?"

"What is truth, Kiril Ivanovich?" exclaimed Carp, quietly, shrugging his shoulders again and bending his head on one side. "Everyone understands it in his own way. And of course, if it's your pleasure, you can take his words for the truth, and if you do not wish to, you can follow your own will."

Carp sighed, and, bowing to the master, spread out his arms in an offended way.

"M-yes, everything here is in subjection to my will," acquiesced the master. "So in your opinion the boy is stupid."

"Quite stupid," answered Carp, with profound conviction.

"Well, in that perhaps you are not right," said Stroganoff, vaguely, and suddenly burst out laughing.

"No, but how he flung that right into your face—ho, ho! So Carp steals? He steals. Ho, ho, ho!"

Ilia went off to the door, stood there listening to the conversation, and felt that it was offensive to him. But when the master began to laugh, a joyous and revengeful feeling sprang up within him, and he looked with triumph at Carp and gratitude at his master. Stroganoff was screwing up his eyes with the effort of laughing, and Carp, hearing his master's laugh,

sent forth from his throat a dry and careful little chuckle,—

“He, he, he!”

Stroganoff, hearing the thin little sounds, said roughly,—

“Shut up the shop.”

As Ilia was going home, Carp said to him, shaking his head,—

“You are a fool, that’s what you are. Just consider, what did you kick up all this row for? Is that the way to gain your master’s favour and obtain a higher place? You blockhead! Do you think he did not know that Mishka and I stole? Why, that is the way he began life himself—he, he! For his sending Mishka away I am bound in all conscientiousness to say thanks to you. But what you said about me, that will never be forgiven. I tell you so beforehand. It was a silly impertinence to say such a thing about me and before my eyes. N-no! I’ll make you remember it. It shows that you do not respect me.”

Ilia listened to this speech in silence, but did not understand it very well. In his opinion Carp ought to be angry with him in a different way; he had felt confident that the shopman would beat him on their way home, and was even afraid of going. But instead of spite, a sneer sounded in Carp’s words, and even his threats did not now frighten Ilia. The sense of Carp’s discourse was made clear to Ilia that same evening, when the master called him upstairs.

“Aha! just go up!” exclaimed Carp, ominously, as a parting shot.

Having mounted the stairs, Ilia stopped at the door of a large room, in the middle of which, beneath a massive lamp that hung from the ceiling, stood a round table with an enormous samovar on it. Round the table sat the master with his wife and daughters, each of the three little girls was just a head shorter than the other, they all had red hair, and the white skin on their long faces was covered thickly with freckles. When Ilia entered they all pressed close against each other and began staring at him full of fear, with three pairs of blue eyes.

"Here he is!" said the master.

"Only fancy, what a boy!" exclaimed the mistress, apprehensively, and looked at Ilia as if she had never seen him before. Stroganoff smiled, stroked his beard, rapped his fingers impressively upon the table, and said,—

"I have called you here, Ilia, to tell you—I have no need of you any more, so pack up all your bag and baggage and go."

Ilia started, opened his mouth with astonishment, but could not say a word, and, turning round, went towards the door.

"Stop!" said the merchant, stretching out his arm towards him, and, knocking the table with the palm of his hand, repeated in a lower tone, "Stop!"

Then he lifted one finger and began speaking slowly in a matter-of-fact way,—

"I called you here not only for that. No. I must teach you—I must explain why you have become obnoxious to me. You have not done me any harm; you're a lad who knows how to read and write, not lazy, honest and strong, n-yes, all these things are your trumps. But in spite of all these trumps you're no good to me, you don't suit me, so to speak. Why? that is the question—n-yes."

Ilia understood that he was being praised and dismissed at the same time. His mind could not assimilate it, and it evoked a double feeling; it seemed to him that the master himself did not know what he was doing. Stroganoff's face seemed to confirm the boy's guess; it was tense with some thought, which the merchant, probably, could not seize and put into words. The boy made a step forward and quietly asked, with respect in his voice,—

"Are you sending me away because I took up the knife?"

"O Lord!" exclaimed the mistress, with fear. "How audacious he is! O Lord!"

"There!" said the merchant, smiling with pleasure at Ilia and poking him with his finger. "You are audacious! just the very word, you are audacious

And a boy who is in service ought to be submissive and meek, as it is said in the Holy Scriptures; he ought to depend entirely on his master, and be of one mind with him; while you have your own. That is not good form, and that's why you're audacious. For instance, you throw in a man's face—thief. That is not right, that's audacity. If you are honest, you can tell me about the man, but quietly, and I will see to it, I'm the master! But you go and say out loudly—thief. No, wait a bit. If of the three only one is honest, that's no good to me. Here especial reckoning is necessary. If one man is honest and nine are rascals, no one wins, and the man will be lost. But if there are seven honest men to three rogues, your side wins. Do you understand? The majority are always in the right. But if there is only one, what's the good of him? That is how you must treat honesty. And in the future you must not thrust it into people's faces, but consider first if they require it?" Stroganoff wiped the sweat from his brow with the palm of his hand, sighed, and continued speaking with a gentle, pleased expression on his face, "Then, again, you catch hold of a knife."

"O Lord Jesus!" exclaimed the mistress with horror, and the girls crept closer to each other.

"It is said, whosoever takes up a knife will perish by it himself. N-yes, that is why you are quite unnecessary to me. That's it. Here are fifty copecks and you can go. Be off. Remember you've done me no harm, and I—none to you. Even—here, I'll give you a present of a fifty-copeck piece. And I have been talking to you, boy, seriously, as I should to a grown man. Perhaps I'm even sorry to lose you, but you don't suit me. If the lynch pin does not fit the axle it's best to throw it away before you begin your journey. Well, you can go."

"Good-bye!" said Ilia.

He had listened to his master's discourse attentively, and had understood from it simply that the merchant sent him away because he could not discharge Carp, being afraid of remaining without a shopman.

For this reason Ilia felt light-hearted and joyous; and his master seemed to him somehow different—simple and kind.

“Take your money!”

“Good-bye,” repeated Ilia, holding the silver pieces tightly in his hand. “Thank you.”

“There’s nothing to thank me for,” answered Stroganoff, nodding to him.

“Oh, oh! he did not even shed one tear,” reached Ilia in a reproachful tone from the mistress.

When Ilia, with a bundle on his back, passed out of the strong gates of the merchant’s house, it seemed to him as if he had walked a great distance and left behind a grey and barren country, about which he had read in a book, where there were neither people nor trees, but only stones, among which lived an old, kind magician, who affably showed the way to everyone who got into that country. It was a clear spring evening. The sun was setting and the windows were ablaze with red fire, which reminded the boy of the day when they saw the town for the first time from the banks of the river. The bag with his things weighed heavily on his back, and he went slowly. People were hurrying along the pavement, and kept jostling him and his bundle, carriages passed with a dash and a rumble; in the slanting rays of the sun he saw the dust hovering in the air, and everything was noisy, bustling and merry. In the boy’s memory rose all that he had gone through during these two years in town. He felt himself a grown-up person, his heart beat proudly and fearlessly, and in his ears rang his master’s words,—

“You’re a boy who knows how to read and write; not stupid, healthy, not lazy. Those are your trumps.”

“We’ll have a game!” exclaimed Ilia to himself, quickening his pace, feeling a great joy and, smiling in spite of himself at the thought that to-morrow he need not go back to the fishmonger’s.

CHAPTER X

HAVING returned to Petruha Filimonoff's house, Ilia came to the proud conclusion that he had really grown very much during his service at the fishmonger's. Everyone in the house treated him with flattering curiosity, and showed him great attention. Perfishka shook hands with him.

"My respects to the shopman. Well, old fellow, have you served your term? I have heard of your exploits—ha, ha! They like to have the soles of their feet licked with your tongue and not the truth spoken."

When Masha saw him, she called out joyously,—

"Oh, oh! How big you have grown."

Jacob was glad too.

"Now we shall be able to read together again. I have a book, *The Albigenses*, a fine story, I can tell you. There's a certain Simon Monfor, he is a monster." And Jacob began to relate hurriedly and confusedly the plot of the story. Ilia, looking at him, thought with pleasure that his big-headed friend had remained unaltered. In Ilia's behaviour at Stroganoff's Jacob did not see anything extraordinary. He heard his friend's tale to the end, and said simply,—

"That was the right thing to do."

Jacob's opinion made Ilia feel slightly hurt.

Petruha, having heard Ilia's tale about all that had happened in the shop, was apparently astonished by his conduct, and said approvingly,—

"You caught them cleverly, boy! Well, of course Kiril Ivanovich could not exchange Carp for you. Carp knows the business, he is worth a great deal. And you, after all that took place, could not have lived with him. You wanted to follow the truth and

acted openly. That's the reason he overcame you." But, nevertheless, on the next day Terence said to his nephew quietly,—

"Beware of Petruha, don't talk so much. Be careful. He has taken a dislike to you, and abuses you. 'See, what a lover of truth he has become,' says he. 'And why is he a lover of truth? Because he is still stupid.' N-yes, that's what he says."

Ilia listened to what his uncle told him and laughed.

"And yesterday he praised me—'cleverly done,' said he. And all people are like that, they praise you to your face and blame you behind your back."

But Petruha's opinion did not lessen Ilia's high estimation of himself. He felt sure he was a hero, he knew that he had behaved well at the merchant's, better than anyone else would have under the circumstances. Two months later, after fruitless searches for another situation, Ilia had the following conversation with his uncle.

"Y-yes," drawled the hunchback, despondently. 'You can't get a place. Everywhere they say you are too big. How shall we live, dear? eh? How?'"

And Ilia answered gravely and convincingly,—

"I'm fifteen years old, I know how to read and write. But if I'm audacious, they'll send me away from the next place too, it's all the same! Who wants an audacious boy?"

"What shall we do?" asked Terence, apprehensively, sitting on his bed and holding tightly to it with his hands.

"This: order me a case and buy me some goods—soap, scents, needles, books, all sorts of things, I'll walk about and sell them."

"I don't quite understand you, Ilia, the eating-house is buzzing in my head. Knock, knock, knock—all the time. Somehow I begin to gather my thoughts with difficulty. And one thing is constantly before my eyes, and in my heart, and in my thoughts."

And in truth the hunchback's eyes wore a tense expression, as if he were continually reckoning something up and could not get it right.

"But just try! Let me go," begged Ilia, taken up with his idea, which promised him liberty.

"Well, God be with you! Let's try."

"There, you'll see how it will be," cried Ilia, joyously.

"Oh, dear!" sighed Terence, and began speaking in a distressed voice.

"If you could grow faster! If you were older—oh, dear! oh, dear! I'd go away. But you're like an anchor to me. I have to stop in this putrescent lake because of you, and am perishing. I would go away to the Saints, and I would say: God's Saints! Benefactors and Interceders! I have sinned! I am suffering—spare me! Intercede for me before God!"

And the hunchback suddenly began to cry. Ilia guessed about what sin his uncle was speaking, and recalled it to his memory. His heart sank within him. He was sorry for his uncle, but he could find no words to say to comfort him, and was silent; and only when he saw the hunchback's tears flowing faster from his sunken, pitiful eyes, he murmured,—

"Well, don't cry then. Wait a bit, when I grow rich by trade, you will be able to go." He was silent for a moment, wrapt in thought, and then said consolingly,—

"Never mind, they'll forgive you."

"Will they forgive me?" asked Terence, softly. And the boy repeated with confidence,—

"They'll forgive! They forgive more than that, I know."

And Ilia became a hawker. From morning till evening he walked about the streets of the town with a case round his neck and the trestles in his hands, and, screwing up his black eyes and putting his nose in the air, looked at the people with dignity. Pulling his hat well over his eyes, he swelled out his throat and cried in a clear, youthful voice,—

"Soap! blacking! pomatum! hairpins! pins! thread! needles! books, nice books!"

Life flowed around him in a noisy bright wave, and he swam in this wave easily and lightly, feeling himself a human being, like everyone else. He sauntered about

the market-places, entered eating-houses and asked in an important way for a couple of glasses of tea and some white bread, and ate and drank leisurely like a man who knows his own worth. Life seemed simple, easy and pleasant to him ; his thoughts took a clear and simple shape, he imagined himself in a few years the owner of a small, clean shop, somewhere in a good, not too noisy, street ; his shop—a haberdasher's, with light, clean goods, such as do not sully nor spoil one's clothes. He saw himself clean, too, healthy and handsome. The whole street respecting him and the girls looking kindly on him. In the evenings, when the shop was shut, he would sit in a clean, light room drinking tea and reading a book. Cleanliness in everything seemed indispensable to him, almost the chief condition of a decent life. Such were his dreams when his trade prospered and no one insulted him by rough treatment, for he had become very sensitive and touchy since he had felt himself an independent man.

But when he failed to sell anything, and sat tired out in some eating-house, or in the street, and called to mind all the rough shouts and pushes of the police, the suspicious and offensive attitude of buyers towards him, the abuses and sneers of his rivals, hawkers like himself, a feeling of despondency and hopelessness stirred uneasily in his breast. His eyes opened wider, he looked deeper into life, and his mind, rich with impressions, tried them one after the other in the scales of his reasoning powers. He saw clearly that everyone's aim was the same as his, that everyone was striving to obtain the wherewithal for a peaceful and clean life, without the fear of hunger, just as he was. And no one tried to refrain from pushing aside anyone who got in his way ; they were all greedy and merciless and often injured each other without any cause, gaining nothing by so doing, but seemingly merely for the pleasure of hurting someone ; sometimes laughing the while, and it was seldom indeed that any felt sorry for the injured one.

Such thoughts made trade seem a dull business to Ilia, his dream of a small, clean shop faded away, he felt an emptiness in his heart and a languor in

his body. It seemed to him that he would never be able to amass sufficient money to open a small shop, but would have to roam about the hot, dirty streets with a case round his neck and a pain in his shoulders and back from the strap, till he grew old. But a successful day reawakened his courage and made his thoughts cheerful again. One day, in one of the noisiest streets, Ilia met Pashka Gratchoff. The smith's son was walking along the pavement with the careless gait of a person taking a walk; his hands were in the pockets of his torn trousers, a torn and dirty blue blouse, that was much too long and large for him, covered his shoulders, and the heels of his peasant boots rapped loudly on the stone pavement at every step. His cap, with a broken shade, was pushed jauntily over one ear, leaving half his shaven head unprotected from the sun, while his face and neck were covered by a thick layer of oily dirt. He recognised Ilia at a distance, nodded merrily, but did not quicken his pace to meet him.

"Good-morning," said Ilia, "what a fop you look."

Pashka squeezed Ilia's hand tightly in his, and, without letting it go, laughed gaily. His teeth and eyes glistened brightly and merrily from under the mask of dirt.

"How do you do?"

"We get on as well as we can: if there's food we gobble it down, and if there's none we squeal and go to bed without any—ha, ha! But I'm glad I met you, the deuce take you!"

"Why don't you ever come and see us?" asked Ilia, smiling.

He, too, was glad to see his old playmate so merry and dirty. He looked at Pashka's peasant boots, then at his own new ones, which had cost nine roubles, and smiled in a self-sufficient way.

"How am I to know where you live?" said Gratchoff.

"At the same place, at Filimonoff's."

"Y-yes? And Yashka said you were selling fish somewhere or other."

Then Ilia told Pashka with pride of his employment at Stroganoff's and about the life he was leading now.

"Done like a brick!" exclaimed Gratchoff, approvingly. "It was the same with me. I was discharged from a printing-office for getting into mischief, so I engaged myself to an artist to grind colours and do different jobs. But the deuce take it, one day I sat down on a wet signboard—well, they did begin beating me! and didn't they give it me, too, the devils! all of them—my master, his wife and the workman. One might have thought they would die from exhaustion. Then they discharged me. Now I am living with a plumber—six roubles a month. I've been to get my dinner and I'm going back to my work."

"You don't seem to hurry."

"Let it go to the dogs! Is it possible to ever get through and finish work? I must call on you some day."

"Do come," answered Ilia in a friendly tone.

"Do you still read books?"

"Of course; and you?"

"And I also peck at them a bit."

"And do you write poetry?"

"Yes, poetry too."

And again Pashka laughed merrily.

"You'll come then, eh? and bring your poetry along with you."

"I'll come, honour bright, and bring some vodka."

"Do you drink?"

"We pour it down. But I must say good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Ilia.

He went on his way thinking of Pashka. It seemed strange to him that this tattered lad had not shown any envy for his fine boots and clean clothes, not even appearing to have noticed them. And when Ilia had told him of his independent life, Pashka was only glad. With an incomprehensible trouble in his heart, Ilia asked himself was it possible that Gratchoff did not seek for what everyone else was seeking? What

could one wish for more than a clean, quiet, independent life?

This gloomy, troubled feeling always grew greater after Ilia had been to church. He very rarely missed attending the church service, going with pleasure to morning and evening service. He did not pray, but simply stood in some corner, and, thinking of nothing in particular, looked at the congregation and listened to the singing. The people stood silent and motionless, and in their silence there was something unanimous, as if everyone were concentrating his thoughts on the same thing. Waves of song and clouds of incense floated through the church; and sometimes it seemed to Ilia as if he were rising up with the sounds, floating with them in the warm, sweet atmosphere, and losing himself in it. In the solemnity and mystery that filled the church and acted in a soothing way on his spirit, there seemed something he had never found in the hurry of life, and which was foreign to his usual desires. At first this impression of Ilia's remained separate from his ordinary everyday impressions, not mixing with them and not troubling him; but after a time he noticed that there existed something in him which was always watching over him, which hid itself timidly and was silent in his busy hours; but when he came to church, it grew gradually larger in his soul, and awakened thoughts that were strangely distressing, and upset his idea of the most important things in life. In such moments he always thought of the tales about the hermit, Antipe, and the rag-picker's loving words about God.

"Our Lord sees everything, knows the measure of everything. There is nobody but Him."

Ilia came home uneasy and restless, conscious that his dream of the future had faded and lost all its attraction, and that there was a new feeling within him which took away his desire to open a haberdashery shop. But after a time life assumed its normal aspect, and the uneasy feeling disappeared in the depths of his soul.

When telling Jacob about the things that interested

him, Ilia never spoke of this inward strife. He never willingly allowed his thoughts to dwell on it nor strove to understand the incomprehensible feeling.

He passed the evenings very pleasantly. Coming home from town, he would enter Masha's cellar and ask in the tone of a person who felt himself quite at home,—

“Little Masha, how about the samovar?”

But the samovar was always ready and stood on the table, purring and whistling. Ilia usually brought something good with him—cracknels, peppermint biscuits, gingerbread made with honey, and sometimes jam made with treacle; and Masha liked to give him tea. The girl had begun to earn money. Matitsa had taught her to make paper flowers, and Masha liked to make bright-coloured roses out of the thin paper that rustled merrily. Sometimes she earned as much as ten copecks a day. Once her father fell ill of typhoid fever, lay in hospital for more than two months, and came home spare and thin, his head covered with beautiful dark curls. He had shaved his rough, disreputable little beard, and, in spite of his yellow, sunken cheeks, seemed to have grown five years younger. He resumed his work by the day in other people's work-shops, and seldom came home even to sleep, leaving his lodgings entirely at his daughter's disposal. She mended his clothes and began calling him *Perfishka*, like everyone else. The shoemaker was amused by her attitude towards him and felt something like respect for his curly-headed daughter, who could laugh as gaily and merrily as he himself.

Drinking tea with Masha in the evening became a habit with Ilia and Jacob. The lads seated themselves at the table and consumed a quantity of tea, taking a long time over it, getting warm and excited and talking about everything that interested them. Ilia related what he had seen in town; Jacob, who read the whole day long, talked about books, the scandals that happened in the eating-house, and complained of his father, but more and more often he spoke of things that seemed queer and incomprehensible

to Ilia and Masha. Masha, who sat the whole day long in her room working and singing, listened to the lads' conversation, spoke little herself, and laughed when there was anything to laugh at. The tea was uncommonly good and the samovar even seemed to wear a fine, jovial and gay expression. Nearly always when the lads had just begun to enjoy their tea, the samovar would begin to hum and grumble in a good-natured, fussy way, and they would find there was no more water in it. Masha would catch it up and carry it off to replenish it. Sometimes she had to do this several times during the evening. If there were a moon, its rays shone on the little company, every day exactly the same, always a spot of the same shape.

In this little hole, surrounded by half-rotten walls and covered with a heavy, low ceiling, there was always a want of air, light, water, bread, sugar, and many other things, but it was merry nevertheless, and the home of many good feelings and innocent youthful thoughts. Sometimes Perfilshka was present at these tea-parties, and sat in a dark corner of the room on a platform near the stubby old stove, which was half sunken in the earth, or else climbed up on to it, hung down his head, and his white, small teeth glistened in the twilight. His daughter would hand him a big mug of tea, a piece of sugar and bread, and he would accept it, and say, smiling,—

"Thank you kindly, Maria Perfilievna, I am much touched by your kindness."

Sometimes he would exclaim, with a sigh of envy,—

"You do have a happy time, you fellows, may you be drenched with rain! It is pleasant, quite like human beings."

And then, smiling and sighing, he would say,—

"Life keeps getting better! Every year it is pleasanter for men. When I was your age I had only the shoemaker's stirrup to converse with. It would begin stroking my back and I would roar at the top of my voice with pleasure. If it stopped, my back got

offended and began to pout and grieve at the absence of its dear friend. Well, it did not make it wait—it was a sensitive shoemaker's stirrup. Yes! that was the only pleasure I ever had, by God! Here, when you grow up, you will have all this to remember—your talks, different events and all your pleasant life. When I grew up—I'm thirty-six—I had nothing to look back upon! Not one single spark! Nothing at all! Just as if I had been blind and deaf at your age. I only remember that my teeth chattered with hunger and cold, and my face was covered with bruises; and how my bones, ears, hair remained uninjured, I can't conceive. There was only the stove with which I was not beaten, but against the stove I was banged as much as you please. N-yes, they took pains with me and dealt with me as if I was a string, that had to be twisted. And although they beat me, and flayed me alive, and drank my blood and threw me on the floor—a Russian is pliable. You can pound him in a mortar, he'll always turn up in his place. A f-fine strong man is he. Look at me, I was ground and chipped, and still I'm alive and kicking, and lead the life of a cuckoo. I fly from eating-house to eating-house, and am content with the whole world. God loves me. He glanced at me just once and laughed. 'Oh,' says He, 'what a fellow you are!' and took no more notice of me."

The boys listened to the shoemaker's flowing speech and laughed. But while Ilia laughed too, the sound of Perfishka's sing-song voice always awakened in him the same importunate and vague idea. One day he tried to make it clear to himself and asked the shoemaker, with an incredulous smile,—

"And so, Perfishka, you don't wish for anything?"

"Who says so? Why, I'm always wishing for a drink."

"No, tell me the truth; you do wish for something, don't you?" insisted Ilia.

"Seriously? Well, then, I'd like a harmonica. I'd like to have a f-fine harmonica, that would cost about twenty-five roubles! S-s-s! Then wouldn't I play you something!"

He was silent for a while and then began to laugh gladly and softly, but the next instant stopped, pondered over something, and at last, fully convinced, said to Ilia,—

“N-no, my boy, the harmonica is no good to me either. First of all, an expensive one I'd certainly sell and spend all the money in drink—one! Secondly, it might turn out worse than my old one—two! Do you know what a harmonica I possess? It is priceless! My soul resides in it! It understands me! I have only just time to think of putting my finger on the stop, and it begins to sing. My harmonica, boy, is a rare one—perhaps it is the only one that exists in this world. My harmonica is like a wife to me. I had a real wife once upon a time—she was not a human being, but an angel! And if I wanted to marry now—why, how could I? it's impossible to find another like her. I should certainly apply the old measure to the new wife, and she would prove shorter, and that would be bad for her and for me. That's how it stands. Oh, dear! not that which is really good is good, but what we love.”

Ilia agreed with Perfishka in his praises of his harmonica. Perfishka's instrument aroused unanimous admiration by its sensitiveness and sound. But Ilia could not believe that the shoemaker wished for nothing. A clear and definite question arose before Ilia: is it possible to live one's whole life in dirt, go about in tatters, drink vodka, and knowing how to play on the harmonica, not wish for anything else? This thought made him look upon Perfishka as an eccentric person, but still he watched the unconcerned fellow with interest, and felt that the shoemaker, in his soul, was the best man in the whole house, although he was a drunkard and a good-for-nothing fellow.

Sometimes the young folk approached those great, deep questions, which, lying open before them, attract inquiring minds and hearts, and then like a bottomless pit swallow them up in mysterious darkness. Such questions were generally raised by Jacob. He had acquired a strange habit; he was always pressing himself close against everything, as if he did not feel firm

upon his legs. When he was seated, he either leant his back against the nearest object or else pressed it tightly with his hand. When walking in the street, with a quick but uneven step, he touched all the curb-stones for some unseen reason, as if he were counting them, or else caught at all the fences with his hand, as if he were trying their solidity. At tea, in Masha's room, he always sat near the window, leaning his back against the wall, and his long fingers holding a chair or the edge of the table. Bending his big head, covered with straight, soft hair, the colour of damp shavings, on one side, he looked at his interlocutors, and his blue eyes in his pale face kept alternately screwing themselves up and opening wide again. He still liked to tell his dreams, but he never could tell the contents of the book he had read without adding something strange and incomprehensible of his own invention. Ilia caught him at this several times, but Jacob was not in the least disconcerted, and said simply,—

"The way I told it was better. It is only the Holy Scriptures upon which it is not allowed to comment, but simple books one can explain as one likes. They are written by men, and I am a man. I can alter what I don't like in them. Just tell me: when you are asleep, where is your soul?"

"How do I know?" answered Ilia, who did not like such questions because they aroused a disagreeable feeling of restlessness in him.

"I believe it is quite true that it flies away," declared Jacob.

"Of course it flies away," said Masha, with conviction.

"And how do you know?" asked Ilia, severely

"I think so."

"It flies away," said Jacob, smiling thoughtfully. "It needs rest too. That's why we have dreams."

Ilia did not know how to reply to such an inoffensive remark, and was silent, although he always experienced a strong desire to refute what his friend said. All were silent for a time, perhaps for several minutes. The dark hole seemed to grow still darker. The lamp

flared, there was a smell of charcoal from the samovar, and a strange, dull sound reached them; it came from the eating-house, which was buzzing and roaring above them. Again Jacob's quiet voice sounded,—

"People bustle about, work and so on. That is called living. Then suddenly—thump! The person is dead. What does that mean? You, Ilia, what do you think, eh?"

"It does not mean anything. When one grows old it's time to die."

"No, but young people and children die too. Strong people die."

"That means they are not strong if they die."

"But what did they live for?"

"There he goes!" exclaimed Ilia, with a sneer, feeling able to answer. "They just live for the sake of living. They work, they endeavour to obtain success. Everyone wants to live well and looks out for the chance of making a career. Everyone seeks an opportunity to get rich and live in cleanliness."

"But those are the poor people. And the rich? They possess everything. What need have they to seek anything?"

"Well, you are clever! The rich people! if they did not exist, for whom would the poor people work?"

Jacob pondered for an instant, and asked,—

"So, in your opinion, everyone lives in order to work?"

"Of course, that is to say not quite all. Some work, while others don't do anything. They have already done their work, amassed money, and live."

"But what for?"

"Devil take you! do they want to live or not? You want to live, don't you?" cried Ilia, getting angry with his friend. But it was difficult to say why he was angry—because Jacob asked questions, or because he answered them badly? He felt that Jacob's questions caught at something inside him that they could not lift up, and only aroused a disagreeable feeling. "Well, you yourself, what do you live for?" cried he to his friend.

"That is what I don't know," said Jacob, meekly. "I wouldn't mind dying—I'm afraid to—but it's interesting all the same."

And suddenly he began speaking gently and reproachfully,—

"You are angry, but quite unjustly. Just think; people live for work, and the work exists for them—and they? It's a wheel that goes round and round and remains on the same spot. And it is quite incomprehensible—what for? And where is God? For God is the axle! He said to Adam and Eve: 'Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth'—but what for?" And bending down to his friend, Jacob said in a low, mysterious voice, with fear in his blue eyes, "Do you know? It was told—what we live for was told. But somebody robbed God—stole and hid away the explanation. And that someone was Satan! Who else but Satan? That is why nobody knows what we live for."

Ilia listened to his friend's incoherent speech, feeling it lay hold of his soul, and was silent.

Jacob continued speaking more hurriedly and softly, his eyes started from their sockets, his pale face was full of dread, and it was quite impossible to understand anything he said.

"What does God want of you—do you know? Aha!" would suddenly rise above the flow of words in a triumphant exclamation. And again quiet, disjointed words poured from his lips. Masha watched her friend and protector with her mouth wide open in astonishment. Ilia knitted his brows angrily. He felt disgusted at not being able to understand. He considered himself cleverer than Jacob, but Jacob always amazed him by his wonderful memory and facility in speaking about all sorts of high matters. At last, getting tired of listening in silence, and feeling a distressing confusion in his mind, he interrupted the speaker angrily,—

"Go to the devil! What are you jabbering about? You have been reading too much, that's what it is, and you don't understand anything yourself."

"But that's just what I'm saying: I don't understand anything!" exclaimed Jacob, with surprise and vexation.

"Then say outright, I don't understand! But you set your wind-pipe going, and chatter away like a madman. And I've got to listen to you."

"No, wait a bit!" Jacob persisted. "Don't you see, it is not in your power to understand? For instance—here is a lamp and a flame. Where does the flame come from? It appears suddenly, and disappears as suddenly. Strike a match and it burns. Consequently, it exists always. Does it float about in the air then, invisible?"

This question lay hold of Ilia too. The disdainful look faded from his face, he looked at the lamp and said,—

"If it were in the air, it would always be warm; but one can light a match when the temperature is below freezing-point. Consequently, it is not in the air."

"But where then?" asked Jacob, looking at his friend hopefully.

"In the match," struck in Masha. But in these conversations, touching on the mystery of life, the girl always remained without an answer. She was accustomed to this and did not get offended.

"Where?" cried Ilia, with exasperation. "I don't know, and don't want to know! I know that one must not put one's hand into it, but one may warm oneself near it. That's all."

"That's all very fine!" said Jacob, indignantly, and with animation. "I don't want to know, indeed! I can say that just as easily as you, and every fool can too. No, just explain—where does fire come from? I don't ask about bread, in that case everything can be seen: from corn—one gets the grain, from the grain—flour, out of flour—dough is made, and it's ready. But how is a man born?"

Ilia looked at his friend's big head with astonishment and envy. Now and then, feeling himself outdone by Jacob's questions, he started up from

his seat and spoke rough, harsh words. Robust and broad-shouldered, he always went up to the stove in such instances, leant his shoulders against it, and, shaking his curly head, spoke, pronouncing each word deliberately,—

"You confuse my mind. You're a queer fellow, that's what you are! And your head is full of all this because you have nothing to do. What sort of a life do you lead? To stand behind a counter is of no importance; and you'll stand like a post your whole life long. But if you were to walk about the streets like me from morning till night, trying to make your fortune, you'd have no time to think of nonsense, you'd be thinking of the best way to seize your opportunity and make a man of yourself. That's why your head is so big, because all sorts of nonsense makes it stick out. Judicious thoughts are small, and they don't make one's head swell."

Jacob listened to him and was silent, sitting doubled up on his chair, and holding on to something tightly with his hands. Now and then his lips moved, but no sound came, and his eyes blinked repeatedly. When Ilia had finished speaking and seated himself at the table again, Jacob began to philosophise.

"They say there is a book called science—black magic, and everything is explained in it—how, and why, and what for. If we could get such a book and read it. Would you read such a book? I expect it's fearful."

During such conversations Masha would rise from the table and seat herself on her bed, from whence she looked first at one and then at the other with her big black eyes. After a time she would begin to yawn and rock herself backwards and forwards, until at last she dropped on her pillow.

"Well, it's time to go to bed," Ilia would say.

"We'll go, only wait a moment. I'll just cover Masha and put out the lamp."

But seeing Ilia put out his hand to open the door, Jacob would hurriedly and piteously say,—

"Just wait a bit. I'm afraid of being alone—it's dark."

"Oh, dear!" Luneff would exclaim scornfully. "You're sixteen, boy, but a baby still. How is it I'm not afraid of anything, eh? Even if I met a devil—I wouldn't mind! But you—"

And he waved his hand at Jacob. Jacob bustled about Masha in silence, then hastily blew out the lamp. The light quivered, disappeared, and the darkness burst into the room silently from all sides. Sometimes, however, a blue ray of moonlight fell gently on to the floor through the window.

CHAPTER XI

ONCE on a holiday, Luneff came home pale, with clenched teeth, and, without undressing, threw himself upon his bed. His heart was full of anger, which lay like a motionless and cold lump in his breast, a dull pain in his neck would not let him move his head, and it seemed to him that his whole body ached with the insult he had received.

That morning a policeman had allowed him to stand with his goods near the circus, in which a performance was going on, for a piece of egg-soap and a dozen hooks, and Ilia had installed himself comfortably near the entrance. But the assistant of the commissary of police had come up, given him a blow on the neck, and kicked over the trestles on which his case stood, and all the goods were scattered on the ground, several things were spoiled, having tumbled into the mud, others were lost. Picking up his goods, Ilia said to the assistant,—

“That is not a lawful proceeding, your honour.”

“What?” asked the offender, twirling his moustache.

“You have no right to.”

“Indeed? Migunoff! take him to the police-station,” said the assistant, calmly.

And the very same policeman who had allowed Ilia to stand near the circus took him to the lock-up where Luneff had remained till evening. Collisions with the police had happend to Luneff before, but this was the first time he had been locked up by them, and never had he felt so insulted and angry. Lying on his bed in his room, he shut his eyes and concentrated all his thoughts on the feeling of painful and distressing oppression that weighed on his breast. On the other

side of the wall the eating-house was full of noise and rumbling which sounded like rapid and muddy streams flowing down the mountains on a misty autumn day. The iron trays clattered, the china rattled, voices called loudly for vodka, tea, beer. The waiters cried,—

“In a minute. I’m bringing it.”

And cutting through the noise like a quivering steel rod, a high voice sang sadly :—

“I did not think that I should spend my youth in weariness.”

Another voice, low and sonorous, drowned in the chaos of sound, joined the first one softly and sweetly :—

“Oh, I have spent my youth in weariness.”

Then the voices melted together into one clear ripple of sadly-beautiful sound that for several minutes rose above the din in a wail :—

“Not in good living and in riches,
But in cursed loneliness.”

Someone cried out in a dry and cracked voice, as if his throat was made of wood,—

“You lie! It is said: ‘Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I will also keep thee from the hour of temptation.’”

“You are lying yourself,” replied the other, hotly and distinctly; “in the same place it is said: ‘So then, because thou art lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth,’ so there! Well, what have you gained?”

A loud laugh resounded and then a shrill voice burst forth like hail-shot.

“And I gave it her—on her little face, on her dainty little face! first upon her ear, and then on her teeth. Whack, whack, whack!”

“Oh, you devil! Ha, ha, ha! W-well?”

The shrill voice continued with a gasp, loud and sharp,—

"She fell to the ground. And I pitched into her face again, into her sweet face! T-that's for you! I was the first to kiss it and I'll smash it."

"Expounder of the Gospel!" someone called out, with a sneer.

"No, I was in my right. A man ought to! he ought to!"

"‘As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten,’ have you forgotten? And again: ‘Judge not, that ye be not judged.’ And then, have you forgotten King David's words?"

Ilia listened to these discussions, songs and laughter for a long time, but they made no impression on him and aroused no thoughts. Before him, in the darkness, floated the thin, hook-nosed face of the assistant of the commissary of police, with green eyes that glistened viciously, and red whiskers that moved. He kept looking at the face, and clenching his teeth tighter and tighter. But the song on the other side of the wall grew louder, the singers were getting animated, their voices sounded bolder and louder, the shrill, piteous sounds found their way into Ilia's heart and touched the icy-cold lump of anger and pride that lay on it:—

"I have traversed,"

sang the high voice,

"From end to end,"

joined in the other; and then both voices melted together in a wail,

"The whole country of Siberia

And I kept searching for the way home."

Ilia sighed and began listening to the sad words. In the dense noise of the eating-house they shone like little stars in a sky covered with clouds. The clouds float by quickly and the stars keep flashing out and disappearing again:—

"Oh! I have chewed my tongue from hunger,
And my bones ache with the cold,"

the song went on expressively.

"Go on, nightingales!" someone cried out in a friendly voice.

Ilia was thinking that these people who were singing so well that the song touched one's heart, would afterwards get drunk with vodka and perhaps begin to fight. The good does not last long in a man.

"Oh! my fate is black,"

wailed the high voice.

And the bass took up the song loudly in a low key:—

"And is like a burden of iron."

Ilia's memory brought up from the past the image of Grandfather Jeremiah. The old man, with tears in his eyes and on his cheeks, and shaking his head, was saying,—

"I have looked and looked and seen no truth."

And Ilia thought that Grandfather Jeremiah loved God, yet hoarded money on the quiet; and Uncle Terence fears God, yet stole the money; and everyone has two natures somehow. In each breast there seems to be a pair of scales, and the heart, bending first to one side and then to the other, is like the arrow of the scales, weighing the load of good and evil.

"Aha!" roared a voice in the eating-house; and the next instant something fell to the ground with such force that Ilia's bed shook under him.

"Stop! Goodness."

"Catch him—ah, ah!"

"Help!"

The noise suddenly grew louder, a chorus of sounds arose, whirling, groaning, trembling in the air, catching at each other like a herd of fierce and hungry dogs. Separate voices were all drowned in the chaos of cries and shouts.

Ilia listened to the noise with pleasure; he was glad that what he expected had happened, thus confirming his opinion of people. He turned over in his bed, put

his hands under his head and gave himself up to his thoughts again.

"I expect Grandfather Antipe's sin was very great if he passed eight years running in silent prayer begging for forgiveness. And the people forgave him and spoke of him with respect, calling him a righteous man. But they ruined his children: one of them they sent off to Siberia and drove the other away from their village."

"Here an especial reckoning is needed!" Ilia recalled to his mind the impressive words of merchant Stroganoff. "If there is one honest man and nine rascals, no one wins, but the man is lost. The majority are always right."

Ilia smiled. A cold, spiteful feeling towards everyone stirred in his breast like a snake. And his memory kept bringing forward well-known scenes. Big, awkward Matista lay in the middle of the yard in the dirt and groaned,—

"Mo-other! Mo-other mine! If you could only see me!"

Tipsy Perfishka stood near her, and, staggering on his legs, was saying reproachfully,—

"She's gorged herself! the sow."

And healthy, ruddy Petruha watched them from the steps, smiling disdainfully.

Ilia pictured all this to himself, and his heart contracted, growing harder and harder.

The quarrel in the eating-house was over. Three voices—two female and one male—tried to get up a song, but it did not succeed. Somebody brought a harmonica and began playing on it very badly for a short time and stopped. Near the wall, next to which Ilia's bed stood, two persons began speaking in a low voice, with frequent and heavy sighs. Ilia listened to them angrily.

"You go on living in this way—working—losing all your life-blood—and not an atom of good comes of it. Everybody lives more or less decently, while we seem to be continually sprawling instead of standing firmly on our legs."

"Y-yes."

"And we can't distinguish anything in the bustle. Only of one thing we can be sure, and that is, that by honest labour you will never be able to build yourself a stone house, but will have to keep a sharp look-out not to break your neck and perish."

"Oh, dear! There's no answer to that."

"And for dishonest work one hasn't the courage nor the cunning. So that—the nut is to the toad's taste, but the toad has no teeth."

"O Lord, our Father."

Ilia also sighed involuntarily. Perfishka's ringing voice could be heard, rising above all the din in the eating-house. The shoemaker called out in a sing-song voluble way,—

"Oh, little brown jug, pour out your contents and don't grudge the master's property. Let's drink and love women till we are reduced to begging. A thread from everybody is enough to make a beggar a loop. And if he gets out of that loop, he can hang himself with his sinews."

There was a burst of merry laughter and cries of approval. Then near the wall the low voices began again:—

"I have worked since childhood, and I'll soon be forty. But often there isn't even enough bread. Of trouble there is plenty every day, but not always any cabbage-soup. Home is dismal. The children cry, my wife grumbles, one longs to be able to shut one's eyes. Well, one fine day you lose all patience, let all the screws loose and go for a spree. When you come to your senses and look round, you find poverty has sharpened her teeth still more while you were drinking and diverting yourself."

"That's true."

"Then you pray: Father All-merciful! Why have I to suffer so? But I suppose He does not hear."

"Yes. I suppose He does not."

The hopeless buzzing of the hollow voice and the still more hopeless and monotonous replies of the other distressed Ilia. He began tossing about on his

bed and gave a loud knock on the wall with his elbow on purpose. The voices were silent.

But Ilia, seized with a miserable restlessness, could lie no longer. He got up, went out into the yard, and stopped on the steps, full of a desire to go away somewhere, but not knowing where to go. It was getting late; Masha was asleep; Jacob had a headache and was lying down in his room, where Ilia did not like to go, because Petruha always scowled when he saw him. A cold autumn wind was blowing. A dense, almost black obscurity filled the yard and the sky could not be seen. All the buildings in the yard seemed to be great masses of obscurity, condensed by the wind. In the damp air floated strange sounds, clapping and rustling, and a strange, soft whisper, like a man's murmur against life.

The wind dashed at Ilia, blew into his face and sent a damp breath down his neck. He shivered, but did not go away, and stood meditating over the impossibility of going on living like this. One must go away from all this dirty bustle and live alone in cleanliness and quiet.

"Who is standing there?" sounded suddenly a hollow voice.

"It is I. Who is that speaking?"

"I—Matitsa."

"But where are you?"

"I'm sitting on the wood."

"What for?"

"So."

And both were silent.

"To-day is the anniversary of my mother's death," said Matitsa in the darkness.

"Did she die a long time ago?" asked Ilia, just for something to say.

"Yes, about fifteen years ago, perhaps more. And is your mother alive?"

"No, she is dead too. How old are you then?"

Matitsa was silent, then gave a whistle and said,—

"About thirty. I'm old. I've hurt my foot. It is swollen like a melon and aches. I've rubbed and

rubbed it with all sorts of things, but they do not help."

"You ought to go to the hospital."

"It's too far, I'll never get there."

"On an isvoschik."

"I have no money."

Someone opened the door of the eating-house, and a noisy mass of sounds burst into the yard. The wind caught them up and dispersed them in the darkness.

"What are you standing here for?" asked Matitsa.

"So. I feel dull."

"Just like me; my room is like a coffin."

Ilia heard a heavy sigh. Then Matitsa said,—

"Let's go to my room?"

Ilia looked in the direction of the woman's voice and answered indifferently,—

"Let's go."

They mounted the stairs which led to the attic, Matitsa walking in front of Ilia. She lifted first her right foot and placed it on the step, then, sighing deeply, lifted the left one slowly. Ilia followed her slowly too, thinking of nothing in particular, as if an oppressive dulness hindered him from going up, just as Matitsa was hindered by her pain.

The woman's room was long and narrow and the ceiling certainly did resemble the lid of a coffin. Near the door stood a Dutch stove and by the wall, with its back against the stove, was a broad bed, beside which was a table with two chairs on either side. Another chair stood near the window, which seemed a dark blot on the grey wall. Here, at the top of the house, the noise and howling of the wind was louder. Ilia sat down on the chair by the window, and, noticing a small holy picture in the corner, asked,—

"Whose image is that?"

"Saint Ann," said Matitsa, reverently, in a low voice.

"And what is your name?"

"Ann too, didn't you know?"

"No."

"Nobody knows," said Matitsa, sitting down heavily on the bed. Ilia looked at her, but did not feel any

inclination to speak. The woman was silent too. They both sat in silence for a long time, three minutes at least, and neither seemed to notice the other's presence. At last Matitsa asked,—

"Well, what shall we do?"

"I don't know," answered Ilia, perplexed.

"Oh, of course not," exclaimed the woman, smiling incredulously.

"Well, what then?"

"Treat me to something. Buy a bottle of beer. No, better buy me something to eat. Nothing else, but only something to eat."

Her voice broke off, she coughed and continued guiltily,—

"Do you see. Since my foot got bad, I could not gain anything. Because I can't go out. And I have spent all. Why, I've had to stay at home five days. Yesterday I had nothing to eat at all scarcely, and to-day I have had nothing at all—by God! it's the truth." Then Ilia remembered that Matitsa led a loose life. He looked at her big face fixedly and saw her black eyes smiling slightly and her lips moving, as if she were sucking something invisible. An awkwardness and a certain feeling of troubled concern for her took possession of him.

"I will bring you something in a minute. I'll bring you some beer."

He rose quickly, ran down the stairs to the entrance of the eating-house, and stopped before the door. Suddenly he lost all desire to return to the attic; but this feeling only flashed for an instant in the dismal darkness of his soul like a spark, and went out instantly. He entered the kitchen and bought some scraps of boiled meat, pieces of bread and the remains of something else eatable, all for ten copecks, of the cook. The cook put it all into a greasy sieve. Ilia took the sieve in both hands like a dish, and at the entrance stopped again, wondering how to get some beer. He could not buy any at the bar himself, Terence would ask for whom it was intended. So he called out the scullery-man and asked him to go and buy some. The scullery-man ran

to the bar, came back, and, having thrust the bottles silently into Ilia's hands, caught hold of the handle of the kitchen door.

"Stop," said Ilia. "It is not for me. A friend of mine has come to see me, it's for him."

"What?" asked the scullery-man.

"I'm treating a friend of mine."

"Aha—well, what of that?"

Ilia perceived that the lie was quite unnecessary and he felt an awkwardness. He mounted the stairs slowly, lending an attentive ear to every sound, as if he were afraid someone would call out and stop him. But nothing was to be heard, except the noise of the wind, no one stopped him, and he entered the attic with a lustful feeling for the woman, it was a timid feeling but nevertheless he was quite conscious of it.

Matitsa put the sieve on her lap and pulled out grey pieces of food with her fingers in silence; she put them into her wide-open mouth and champed loudly. Her teeth were big and sharp, and before putting a piece into her mouth she examined it attentively from all sides, just as if she were looking for the most tasty bit.

Ilia watched the woman fixedly and thought how he would take her in his arms and begin kissing her, but felt afraid that he would not know how to do it, and that she would mock him. He grew hot and cold at the thought. The wind rustled on the roof, blew in at the garret window and knocked at the door of the room, and each time the door shook Ilia started, expecting every minute that someone would come in and find him there.

"Shall I lock the door?" he asked.

Matitsa nodded her head in silence. Then she put the sieve on the top of the stove, crossed herself before the image of Saint Ann, and said,—

"God be praised, the woman is satisfied. Oh, what a little a human being needs."

Ilia was silent. The woman looked at him, sighed and said,—

"And from him who desires much, much will be claimed."

"Who will claim much?" asked Ilia.

"Why, God—don't you know that?"

Ilia did not answer her. The name of God on her lips awakened in him an acute but indefinite feeling, which he could not have put into words, and it took away his desire to clasp the woman in his arms. Matitsa caught hold of the bed with her hands, lifted up her big body and moved it closer to the wall. Then she spoke in an indifferent and torpid voice,—

"While I was eating I was thinking all the time of Perfishka's daughter. I've been thinking of her a long time. She lives with you both, you and Jacob—that won't bring her any good, think I. You'll ruin the girl before her time, and she'll go the same way as I. And my way is a filthy and cursed way, and women and girls don't walk along it, but crawl like worms."

She was silent for a moment, and then continued, looking attentively at her hands, which were lying in her lap,—

"Soon the girl will be grown up. I asked a few cooks and other women of my acquaintance if they knew of a situation for her, but they answered that there was none. Sell her, they said. That will be better for her; they will give her money and dress her decently, they'll give her a lodging too. It happens sometimes, to be sure. Sometimes a rich man, when he gets feeble and is full of filth and women do not love him any more for nothing—well, such an abominable creature goes and buys a girl, and ruins her. Perhaps it's for her good, but all the same it must be repugnant at first, and it would be better without. It is better to live hungry, but pure, than—"

She began to cough, as if some word choked her, but with an effort, in the same indifferent voice, she finished,—

"Than filthy and hungry—like me."

The wind flew about the garret and knocked insolently at the door. A fine rain rattled on the roof and outside the window a soft sound floated hither and thither,—

"E-e-e."

The woman's indifferent voice and her heavy, motionless figure did not encourage Ilia's feeling to grow, nor did it instil the courage necessary for the expression of his desire. Matitsa seemed to push him further and further away from her; he noticed it and got angry with her.

"Lord, O Lord," said the woman, sighing softly. "Holy Mother!"

Ilia moved angrily in his chair and said in a surly voice,—

"You say you are filthy, but nevertheless you have nothing but God on your lips. Do you think He wants it of you?"

Matitsa glanced at him, was silent, and hung her head.

"I don't understand what you are saying."

"There's nothing to understand," said Ilia, getting up from his chair. "You are all alike, you are wanton all your life long and then call on God. If you call to God you must not be wanton."

"Oh!" exclaimed the woman, distressed. "What's that? Who thinks of God if not the sinners? Who else?"

"That I don't know," said Ilia, feeling an invincible wish to insult this woman and people in general. "I only know that it's not for the likes of you to speak of Him—yes. Not for you, you only screen yourself from others behind Him. I see through you, I am not a child, I can see. Everybody wails and complains, but why do they harm each other? Why do they cheat and rob each other? and are greedy over every bit of money? Aha! They sin, and then hide behind a corner! Lord, have mercy on us, indeed! I know them, the cheats and devils! They dupe each other and God too, and yet—"

Matitsa looked at him in silence, with her mouth wide open and her neck stretched out, while in her eyes was an expression of dull astonishment. Ilia went up to the door, tore off the hook abruptly and went out, banging the door noisily behind him. He knew he had cruelly insulted Matitsa and was glad of it, and felt his

heart lighter and his head clearer. Coming down the stairs with a firm tread, he whistled under his breath, and his anger kept whispering to him hard, insulting words. It seemed to him as if all these words were red hot and were lighting up the darkness within him and pointing out to him a way which led aside from everyone else; and he was saying the words not only to Matitsa, but to Uncle Terence, and Petruha, and merchant Stroganoff—to everyone in fact.

“That’s it!” thought he, coming into the yard. “There’s no necessity to stand on ceremony with you—you rabble.”

The wind flew about in the yard, filling the air with sounds that resembled a cold, hard laugh.

CHAPTER XII

SOON after his visit to Matitsa, Ilia began to frequent women. The first time it happened thus: one day, as he was going home, a woman came up to him and said,—
“Come with me?”

He looked at her, and in silence followed at her side. But, walking along, he bowed his head and kept looking round in fear of meeting someone he knew. After a few steps the woman said warningly,—

“Mind—a rouble.”

“All right!” said Ilia. “Let’s go on quicker.”

All the way to the woman’s lodging they both walked in silence. And that was all.

But women led to great expenses from the very first, and Ilia came gradually to the conclusion that his business was a useless loss of time and health, and that it would not give him the possibility of leading a clean life. At one time he thought of getting up lotteries and cheating his customers, like other hawkers. But, after thinking it over, he decided that the device was too trivial and troublesome. He would have to hide from the police or else curry favour with them and pay them, and this was repugnant to him. He liked to look everyone straight in the eyes, and felt a keen pleasure in the consciousness of being better dressed and cleaner than the other hawkers, and of not drinking vodka and cheating, like others. He walked about the streets sedately, without any hurry; his face, with its prominent cheekbones, was grave, and wore an expression of reserve; when he talked, he screwed up his dark eyes, and though he said little, it was to the point. He would often picture to himself how nice it would be if he suddenly found some money, a thousand roubles or more. Tales about robberies always awakened a burn-

ing interest in him: he bought a newspaper, read attentively all the details of the robbery, and perused the papers for a long time afterwards to see if the thieves were found out or not; and if they were caught, he got angry and abused them, saying to Jacob,—

“They’re caught, the fools! They ought not to have undertaken the job if they didn’t know how to, the idiots!”

One day, sitting in his room with Jacob, he said,—

“But nevertheless life is easier for a rogue than for an honest man.”

Jacob’s face grew constrained, he screwed up his eyes and spoke in the low, mysterious voice in which he always talked of grave matters.

“The other day your uncle drank tea with an old man. I suppose he was a well-read person. And the old man said that in the Bible it is written: ‘The strongholds of robbers stand firm, and they that provoke God are secure; into their hand God giveth abundantly.’”

“You are not lying?” asked Ilia, listening attentively to his friend.

“They are not my words,” continued Jacob, as if he were feeling for something in the air. “I don’t believe either that they are in the Bible. Perhaps he invented it himself, the old fellow. I asked him once or twice, he repeated the same, word for word. And the words are, I believe, correct. We must look in the Bible.”

And, leaning over to Ilia, Jacob said in a low voice,—

“Take my father, for instance. He’s at peace! But he angers God.”

“And how greatly too!” exclaimed Ilia.

“He’s elected member of the town council, he is.”

Jacob bent his head, sighed deeply, and added,—

“Every action of a man ought to be as smooth as an egg in his conscience, but instead, heigho! I’m sick of it all. I don’t understand anything. I have not got the knack of life and don’t feel any devotion to the eating-house. But my father keeps hammering at me: You’ve been idling about enough, come to your senses—work. But what work? I sell at the bar when Terence is not there, and although it’s repugnant to

me, I bear it. But to do something of my own free will, I can't."

"You must learn to," said Ilia, imperiously.

"Life is difficult," said Jacob in a low voice.

"Difficult? for you? That's a lie," cried Ilia, jumping up from the bed and coming up to his friend, who was sitting near the window. "It's difficult for me, yes. But for you, when your father gets old you'll be the master, afterwards he will die. But I, as I walk along the streets, I see trousers, waistcoats, watches and all sorts of things in the shop windows. I see them and say to myself: you'll never wear such trousers, you'll never have such watches—d'you understand? But I want them, and first of all I want to be respected. Am I worse than anyone else? I'm better. Am I a rascal? But rascals turn up their noses at me, they get elected members of the town council. They have their own houses—eating-houses. Why are rascals lucky, and I not? I also wish for something good—real."

Jacob looked at his friend, and suddenly said quietly, but distinctly,—

"May God keep you from luck!"

"What? why?" cried Ilia, stopping in the middle of the room and looking at Jacob excitedly.

"You are greedy, nothing will satisfy you," explained Jacob.

Ilia gave an angry laugh.

"Nothing will satisfy me? Just tell your father to give me half the money that he and my uncle stole from Grandfather Jeremiah, and I'll be satisfied, yes. I'm greedy, am I? and your father—"

But here Jacob got up from his chair and went slowly to the door, with his head bent low. Ilia saw that his shoulders quivered, and his neck was bent, as if someone had given him a heavy blow on it.

"Wait a bit!" said Ilia, disconcerted, taking his friend by the arm. "Where are you off to?"

"Let me go, brother," said Jacob, almost in a whisper, then stopped and glanced at Ilia. His face was pale, his lips were tightly compressed, and he was quite done for, as if he had been crushed by a great weight.

"Well, never mind, wait a bit," said Ilia in a guilty voice, leading him carefully from the door and putting him back in his chair. "Don't be angry with me, what's the use? It's the truth."

"I know," said Jacob.

"You know?"

"Yes."

"Who told you?"

"Everyone says so."

"Y-yes. But those who say so are rascals themselves."

Jacob glanced at him with piteous eyes and sighed.

"I did not believe it, I thought people said it from spite, out of jealousy. Afterwards, I began to believe, and if you say so now, it means—"

He waved his hand, turned away from his friend, and remained motionless with bent head, holding on tightly to the seat of his chair with his hands. Ilia quitted his friend's side, sat down on his bed in the same pose as Jacob, and was silent, not knowing what to say to comfort him.

On the other side of the wall people were shouting and roaring, dishes clashed, and a tipsy woman's voice rose shrilly,—

"I can't sleep nor rest, and sleep won't come to me."

"And one has to live in a place like this," said Jacob in a half whisper.

"Y-yes," responded Ilia in the same tone. "I understand, you're not happy. There's one comfort, it's the same for all, if one looks round. Everyone's fate is the same."

"You know about that for certain?" asked Jacob, timidly, without looking at his friend.

"I? I saw them. You remember, when I ran away? I looked through a crack and saw them sewing up the pillow, and the old man was still in his death agony."

Jacob shrugged his shoulders, but did not say a word. They sat for a long time in silence, both in the same attitude, one on the bed, the other on his chair. Then Jacob got up, went to the door, and said to Ilia,—

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye, brother. Don't take it to heart so much. What's to be done?"

"I'm all right," responded Jacob, opening the door. Ilia followed him with his eyes and fell back heavily on to his bed. He was sorry for Jacob, and his anger against his uncle and Petruha, and everyone else, blazed up again. He saw that such a weak man as Jacob could not live among them, and that Jacob was a good man, kind, quiet and pure. Ilia began meditating about people, and his memory brought up many cases which showed people were spiteful, cruel and false. He knew many such cases, and it was easy for him to bespatter people with the dust and bitterness of his recollection; and the worse they seemed to him to be the harder it was for him to shake off the strange mingled feeling of sadness, bitterness and fear at the thought of his own loneliness in the dark, sorrowful life that was eddying around him like a roaring whirlwind.

When, at last, he could no longer bear to lie alone in his small room, through the walls of which filtered the sordid and discordant sounds of the eating-house, he got up and went out. For a long time that night he walked about the streets wrestling with the gloomy and miserable feelings which oppressed him.

He walked about in the darkness alone, thinking, and it seemed to him as if an enemy of some sort were watching him and pushing him inexorably in the direction of everything that was most dismal and wretched in life, and that made his soul ache and his heart burn with anger. There must be some good in the world—good people, and good actions, and joy; why, he asked himself, could he not see it? why did he only come into contact with the bad and the dismal? Who was pushing him towards the darkness, the dirt and the evil of life?

He was walking along, overwhelmed with these thoughts, through a field near the stone wall of a monastery, which lay outside the town, and looking straight in front of him. Great clouds moved heavily and slowly in his direction, appearing out of the gloomy distance. Here and there above his head, among the

clouds, shone for a moment blue spaces of sky, in which the stars sparkled. The stillness of the night was broken from time to time by the harmonious sound of the watch-bell of the monastery church, the sole movement in the dead stillness that enveloped the earth. Even from the dark mass of the town buildings, that lay behind Ilia, the noise of life did not reach him, although it was not late. The night was frosty ; Ilia stumbled against the frozen mud as he walked. An awed feeling of loneliness and fear, the outcome of his thoughts, made him stop. He leaned against the cold stone of the monastery wall, trying to comprehend the nature of the power which seemed to be guiding his life and urging him towards sorrow and evil.

A cold shiver of fear shook his body, and, gripped by a powerful foreboding of evil, he tore himself away from the wall, and set forth hurriedly towards the town, constantly stumbling in the mud, not daring to look behind him and pressing his hands tightly to his side.

CHAPTER XIII

A FEW days later Ilia met Pashka Gratchoff. It was evening; tiny snowflakes floated lazily in the air, sparkling in the light of the lamps. In spite of the cold, Paul had nothing on but a fustian shirt without a belt. He was walking slowly, his head bent low and his hands in his pockets, stooping, as if he were looking for something on the ground. When Ilia caught him up and called out, he lifted up his head, looked up at Ilia's face, and said indifferently,—

"Ah! it's you."

"How do you do?" asked Ilia, walking by his side.

"It would be worse if it could. And how are you?"

"P-pretty fair."

"It's not sweet for you either, I suppose."

They were silent, walking side by side and touching each other with their elbows.

"Why don't you come and see us? I've asked and asked you," said Ilia.

"I have no time, brother. We have not much spare time given us, you know that yourself."

"You could find some if you wanted to," said Ilia, reproachfully.

"Don't be angry. You ask me to come and see you, but you never once asked where I live, to say nothing of coming and seeing me."

"Well, that's true!" exclaimed Ilia, with a smile. "Just fancy!"

Paul glanced at him, smiled and said more cheerfully,—

"I live quite alone, I have no friends, I don't seem to meet anyone in accord with me. I've been ill and lay in a hospital for about three months, no one came to see me during all that time."

"What ailed you?"

"I caught a chill while I was tipsy. I had typhoid fever. When I began to get well — it was torture! I lay quite alone all day and all night, and it seemed to me as if I were dumb and blind, thrown into a pit like a pup. Thanks to the doctor, he gave me books all the time, or else I'd have died of depression."

"Were the books good ones?" asked Luneff.

"Y-yes, brother, they were fine! I kept reading poetry—Lermontoff and Nekrasoff and Poushchine, I read, and it was as sweet as if I were swallowing milk. There is, brother, such poetry, that when you read it, it's like your sweetheart kissing you. And sometimes a verse will give you such a blow on the heart: you blaze up as if it had struck a spark."

"I'm beginning to get out of the way of books," said Ilia, and sighed.

"Indeed?"

"Yes. What's the good? One reads of one thing, and sees something quite different in real life."

"That's what is good. Let's go to an eating-house. We'll sit a while and chat. I must go to a certain place, but it's too early yet, perhaps we'll go there together."

"To an eating-house? Let's go!" acquiesced Ilia, and took Pashka by the arm in a friendly way. The latter looked into his face again, smiled and said,—

"We were never very great friends, but I like to meet you nevertheless."

"Well, I don't know if you're glad to see me. It's as if you weren't. But I—"

"Heigh-ho, brother!" Paul interrupted him. "You caught me up when I was thinking of such things, it's best not to remember them."

He waved his hand, was silent, and went on more slowly.

They entered the first eating-house they came to, sat down in a corner and asked for some beer. By the lamplight Ilia saw that Paul's face was thin and drawn, his eyes had an anxious expression, and his lips, that were usually half open in a mocking way, were now tightly compressed.

"Where are you working now?" he asked Gratchoff.

"In the printing-office again," answered Paul, sadly.

"Is it hard?"

"N-no. It isn't the work that wears, but worry."

Ilia felt a kind of pleasure seeing the once boisterous and merry Pashka now despondent and troubled. He wanted to know what had so changed him, and constantly refilling his glass, he kept on questioning him.

"Well, and how does your poetry get on?"

"I've thrown it up, but before I wrote a great deal. I showed it to the doctor; he praised me. One piece he even had printed in the papers. They gave me thirty-nine copecks for it."

"Oho!" exclaimed Ilia. "That's fine! What was it like? Just say it."

Ilia's warm interest and several glasses of beer cheered Gratchoff up. His eyes flashed and the colour came into his yellow cheeks.

"Which?" asked he, rubbing his forehead hard. "I've forgotten. There, by God! I've forgotten! Wait a bit, perhaps I'll remember. They're in my head, like bees in a hive, buzzing about! Sometimes when I begin to write, I get quite excited and hot all over, and tears come into my eyes."

"Really? but why?" asked Ilia, astonished and incredulous.

"It's like that. Something burns in me, I want to speak out, but no words come, and I feel disgusted."

He sighed, and, shaking his head, added,—

"In my mind there's many a thought, which on paper comes to nought."

"Say some!" urged Ilia. The more he looked at Paul, the greater grew his curiosity, and mingling with it a warm feeling of admiration and sympathy.

"I write mostly funny pieces, about my life," said Gratchoff, smiling in embarrassment.

"Well, say a funny piece," insisted Ilia.

Then Gratchoff cast a glance round, coughed, rubbed his chest, and began hurriedly in a half whisper, not looking at his friend's face:—

"It is night. I am sick ! Through the dim window-panes
The pale moon throws its rays in my room.
Smiling kindly it draws a light pattern of blue
On the mouldy damp wall of stone and remains
Of the dirty wall-paper, torn, hanging in strips.
In silence I sit and look on at it all
And I can't go to sleep for my troublesome thoughts."

Paul stopped, sighed heavily, and continued more slowly and softly:—

"My fortune pursues me and crushes me down.
It tears at my heart and strikes at my brain,
It won't even leave me the girl that I like,
But it gives me this bottle to lessen the pain.
The bottle is standing before me. The moon
Makes it glisten, and sparkle, and smile like itself,
And the wine inside heals the wounds of my heart.
A mist rises up in my head from the drink,
My thoughts are got rid of and then I can sleep.
And won't it be better to drink a glass more?
I'll have one. Let those who can sleep go without.
But my thoughts won't allow me to do so, I doubt."

Having finished, Gratchoff glanced for an instant at Ilia, and, bending his head still lower, said softly,—

"There—they're mostly like that—uncouth, somehow." He drummed with his fingers on the edge of the table and began moving uneasily in his chair.

For several seconds Ilia looked fixedly at Gratchoff with suspicion and astonishment. In his ears rang the bitter and harmonious words, and it was difficult for him to believe that they were composed by this same thin, beardless youth with restless eyes, dressed in an old coarse shirt and heavy boots.

"W-well, brother, they are not so very funny," said he, slowly and quietly, observing Paul. "They're good. They have found their way to my heart, really ! Here, say them over again, once more."

Paul lifted his head quickly, glanced at his listener with merry eyes, and, moving closer to him, asked softly,—

"No, really—do you like them?"

"By God ! yes. What an odd fellow you are. Would I say an untruth?"

"All right, I believe you—you're straightforward. You're a fine fellow, really."

"Say some more."

Paul began speaking softly and thoughtfully, stopping when necessary, and sighing deeply when his voice failed him; and when he had finished, Ilia's doubt as to whether Paul had composed the poetry himself grew greater.

"Something else!" he demanded.

"D'you see, I had better come to you some day with my copy-book. They're all very long, and it's time for me to go! And then I don't remember them well. All the beginnings and ends are on the tip of my tongue. Here's an end—I have one piece—it's as if I am in a forest in the night-time and lose my way and am tired out—well, and I feel frightened—everything is quite still, I am alone—I am trying to find my way and am bemoaning my lot:—

"My heart is weary,
My feet are sore,
There is no way.
Dear Mother Earth,
Where shall I rest me,
Will you not say?
I lay me down
Upon her loving
And verdant breast,
And with my heart
I hear her whisper:
'Come here and rest.'"

"But it's the truth: life is like going through an untouched forest, you see the light, but cannot find the way that leads to it. Listen, Ilia, come with me, eh? Let's go together? I don't want to say good-bye to you yet." Gratchoff had risen from his chair and was bustling about, pulling Ilia by the sleeve and looking into his face affectionately.

"I'll come!" said Ilia. "I want to stay with you too. To tell you the truth—I believe and don't believe in you. You are too strange! And then your poetry is pat."

"You don't believe it's mine? That doesn't matter! When you see—you'll believe," said Paul, going out of the eating-house into the streets.

"If it's your own, you're a fine fellow!" exclaimed Ilia, sincerely. "Go on! Tell me how real people live."

"Brother, when I get more into the way of it, I'll write; then won't I wake you up."

"Scratch away! Let them know."

"I say to myself sometimes: 'Oh you! You are well fed, and well clothed'—but I?"

"That's it!"

"Am I not a human being?"

"All are equal."

"He who wears velvet and silk has all the good things, and he whose breast is not covered must go about with an empty belly? No, nothing of the sort."

"They lie! All are equal."

"Heigh-ho, Ilia! If only I had enough brains!"

They were walking along quickly, catching the words, which they threw hotly and hurriedly to each other, in mid air, getting more and more excited and becoming closer friends. They both felt a joy at seeing their thoughts were the same, and it made their spirits rise still higher. The snow, falling in big flakes, melted on their faces, rested on their clothes, stuck to their boots, and they walked along in the mist and the slush.

"I understand everything!" Paul was calling out with assurance.

"One can't live like this," chimed in Luneff.

"If you've been in a gymnasium—you're a gentleman, even if your father was a water-carrier."

"That's it! But way am I to blame if I did not go to a gymnasium, eh?"

"You get the learning, while I get this," said Gratchoff, biting his thumb at Ilia. "No, just wait a bit."

"Oh, the devil!" swore Ilia, putting his foot into a hole full of mud and snow.

"Keep to the left."

"But where are we going, deuce take it?"

"To Sidorihä."

"Where?"

"To Sidorihä—don't you know?"

"I've never been there," after a pause answered Ilia, and, making two or three steps, said laughing, "Our ways of life are different, brother."

"Heigh-ho!" said Paul, quietly, "I know that. But I must be there; I have business."

"I—I have nothing against it. I'll come too, all the same!"

"I'll tell you, Ilia! Though it's bitter for me to talk about it."

Paul spat on the ground noisily and was silent.

"What is it?" asked Luneff, pricking up his ears.

"You see," began Paul, after a pause, "there's a girl there. You'll see what's she's like, she can set your whole soul on fire. She was housemaid to the doctor who treated me. I used to go to him for books after I got well. Well, I used to have to sit in the kitchen, waiting for him. And she was there, jumping about like a squirrel and laughing. Near her I was like a chip near a fire. I made up to her. She gave way at once, without any resistance. And it began! It was as if the sky were on fire. I flew to her, like a feather into the fire. We kissed till our lips were sore and our bones ached, heigh-ho! She was clean, and small, like a plaything, you caught her in your arms—and she disappeared entirely! She was like a bird that had flown into my heart, and was singing and singing there."

He stopped and gave a strange sob with a greedy sound.

"Well?" asked Ilia, interested in his tale.

"One day the doctor's wife caught us—the devil take her! And she was a kind lady too, the damned fool! Sometimes she talked to me too—kindly. She was handsome, the witch!"

"Well?" repeated Ilia.

"Well, she kicked up a row. Vera was turned away

and I too. They abused her, and me too. She, Vera, came to me, but I had no situation then. We had to starve. We sold everything to the last thread. Well, she has a will of her own. She ran away, and was lost for about two weeks. Then she reappeared, dressed in the latest fashion and all—bracelets—and money.” Pashka gnashed his teeth, and said in a hollow voice, “I beat her badly.”

“Did she go away?” asked Ilia.

“N-no, if she had gone away I’d have drowned myself.”

“She remained with you?”

“She said to me—‘either kill me, or else don’t touch me. I’m a burden to you. But I won’t give my soul away to anybody.’”

“And what did you do?”

“I did everything I could: I beat her and cried. What else could I do? I had nothing to give her to eat.”

“Doesn’t she want to take a situation?”

“The devil only knows! She said: ‘All right, suppose I do as you wish, and we have children—what shall we do with them? As it is everything is all right,’ said she, ‘all is yours, and there’ll be no children.’”

Ilia Luneff pondered a moment and said,—

“She’s wise.”

Pashka remained silent, walking quickly in the snowy darkness. He outstripped his friend about three paces, then turned round, stopped, and said in a hollow, hissing voice,—

“When I think that others kiss her I feel as if a leaden weight lay on my heart.”

“Can’t you throw her up?”

“Her?” cried Paul, with astonishment.

Ilia understood his astonishment when he saw the girl.

They had come to the outskirts of the town, to a house of one storey. Its six windows were tightly closed with shutters and this made the house look like a long shed. Wet snow in a thick layer stuck to the walls and

roof, as if it wanted to hide or crush the house. Pashka knocked at the gates saying,—

"This is an exceptional establishment. Sidoriha gives the girls a room and feeds them and charges each fifty roubles a month. There are only four girls. Well, of course, Sidoriha keeps wine and beer and all that's necessary, sweets, and so on. But she does not put any restraint upon the girls; if they like they can go out, and if they like they can stay at home, but fifty roubles they must give her at the end of the month. All these girls are expensive ones, they can get the money easily. One of them—Olimpiada—never goes for less than twenty-five roubles."

"And yours—how much?" asked Ilia, shaking the snow from his clothes.

"I don't know, she's dear too," after a pause answered Gratchoff in a low voice.

A noise was heard behind the door and a golden thread of light trembled in the air.

"Who's there?"

"It is I, Vassa Sidorovna—Gratchoff."

"Ah!" The door opened and a small shrivelled old woman, with an enormous nose on her flabby face, let the light of her candle fall on Pashka and said kindly,—

"How do you do, Pashka? Vera has been in a flutter for a long time waiting for you. Who's that with you?"

"A friend."

"Who has come?" asked someone out of the dark, long corridor in a harmonious voice.

"Somebody for Vera, Lipochnka," said the woman. "Vera, your man has come!" cried the same harmonious voice, echoing down the corridor.

At the end of the passage a door opened quickly, and in the broad stream of light appeared the slight figure of a girl, dressed all in white, with thick golden tresses about her shoulders.

"What a time you've been!" drawled she, capriciously, in a low voice. Then she stood up on tip-toe, put her hands on Pashka's shoulders and looked over him at Ilia with kind hazel eyes.

"That is my friend, Ilia Luneff. I met him, that's why I'm late," said Paul.

"How do you do?"

The girl gave Ilia her hand and the broad sleeve of her white jacket fell back almost to her shoulder. Ilia shook the dry, hot hand respectfully and carefully in silence. He looked at Paul's companion with the same rapture that one looks at a graceful fragrant birch tree in a dense forest, amidst wind-fallen trees and swampy hillocks; and when she drew aside to let him pass in at the door, he stepped aside too, and, inclining his head respectfully, said to her,—

"You—first!"

"Wha-at a gentleman!" laughed she. And her laugh was good—merry and clear. Paul laughed too, saying,—

"You've petrified the lad, Vera. Look, he's standing before you like a bear before honey."

"Is that so?" asked the girl of Ilia, merrily.

"Quite true!" acquiesced the latter, with a smile. "You've taken the ground away from under my feet with your beauty."

"Just you fall in love with her! I'll kill you," threatened Paul, smiling joyfully. It was a pleasure to him to see the impression that his sweetheart's beauty had made on Ilia, and his eyes flashed proudly when he looked at her. And she too gloried in herself with an innocent shamelessness, conscious of her woman's power. She had nothing on but a wide jacket on top of her chemise, and a skirt, white as snow. Her jacket was not buttoned, and kept opening, showing her strong, firm body. Her cherry lips quivered with a pleased child-like smile; she seemed to be admiring herself, as a child admires a plaything of which it has not yet tired. Ilia, without taking his eyes off her, watched how gracefully she walked about the room, with her head in the air, looking lovingly at Paul, laughing and talking; he felt sad at the thought that he had no such companion, and sat in silence, looking about him.

In the middle of the light, clean and tidy room stood a table covered with a cloth; on the table a samovar

boiled noisily and everything was fresh and new. The cups, bottle of wine, plates, on one of which was some sausage and bread, were all new and clean, and pleased Ilia, making him feel envious of Paul; while Paul sat full of joy and was saying appropriately:—

“The moment I see you,
I feel the sun’s ray;
I forget all my woe
And am blithesome and gay.

’Tis good to live,
When one sees you once more.
’Tis well, that I have
Such a girl to adore.”

“You dear Pashka! How nice it is!” cried Vera, rapturously.

“They’re hot! Just out of the oven. Eh! Ilia! that’s enough for you, admiring her? Provide yourself with your own.”

“And a nice one!” in a strange new voice, said the girl, looking into Ilia’s eyes.

“God can’t give me anybody nicer than you!” said Ilia, sighing and smiling.

“Don’t speak of what you know nothing about,” said Vera, softly.

“He knows,” said Pashka, frowning and turning to Ilia. “You understand, everything is all right and joyous, suddenly you remember and it stabs you like a knife!”

“Don’t think of it,” said Vera, bending her head over the table. Ilia glanced at her, and saw that her ears were red. “You must say to yourself,” continued the girl in a low voice, but firmly, “although it’s only for one day, she’s mine! It is not easy for me to bear either; but I don’t consent to mix pain and happiness together. It says in the song—‘my pain I will drink all alone, my joy I will share with you.’”

Paul listened to her words and continued to frown.

Ilia wanted to say something kind and encouraging to them, and, after a moment’s thought, said,—

"What's to be done, if you can't undo the knot? But I will say this to both of you: if I had a thousand roubles or ten thousand even, I would say: 'Here you are! take them, do me the pleasure, for the sake of your love.' For I see and feel in your case there is soul and purity, and a clean conscience, and all the rest is rot!"

Something blazed up inside him and enveloped him in a hot wave. He even got up from his chair, seeing the girl had lifted her head and was looking at him with grateful eyes, and Paul was smiling at him and waiting for him to say something more.

"I see such beauty as yours for the first time, and see for the first time, too, how people love each other, and what you are worth, Paul. I'm sitting here, and say straight out—I envy you. I feel sad and joyful. Would to God everything goes well with you. And as for all the rest, I'll say this: I hate chuvashes and Morduates, they are abhorrent to me! Their eyes are bleared and their bodies are filthy. But I bathe in the same river as they do, and drink the same water as they. Must I deny myself the use of the river because of their filthiness? Why? I believe that God purifies it."

"That's true, Ilia! You're a brick!" cried Paul, hotly.

"And you must drink from the stream too," sounded Vera's voice softly.

"But where shall I find it?" asked Ilia. "No, it will be better if you pour me out some tea, Vera!"

"Darling!" exclaimed the girl. "How good you are!"

"Thank you!" said Ilia, gravely, and, bowing to her, sat down.

His speech and the whole scene acted on Paul like wine. His face was flushed, his eyes sparkled with animation, he jumped up from his chair and began pacing about the room.

"Heigh-ho! the devil take me! It's good to live on this earth when people feel like children! It was a clever thought to bring you here, Ilia, it has done my soul good. Let's have a drink! Pour out, Vera, dear."

"He's merry again!" said the girl, with a loving

smile, looking at him, and turned to Ilia, "He's always like that—he either shines like a rainbow, or else gets grey, and dull, and angry."

"That's not good!" said Ilia, sedately. And all three began to speak loudly and merrily, mingling their words with light-hearted laughter.

Someone knocked at the door and asked,—

"Vera! may I come in?"

"Come in, come in! Here, Ilia Yakovlich—this is Lipa, my friend."

Ilia rose from his chair and turned towards the door: a tall, slender woman stood before him and looked into his face with calm blue eyes. A sweet perfume floated from her clothes, her cheeks were fresh and pink, and on her head was a coil of dark hair, like a crown, which made her look still taller.

"I was sitting alone, and felt dull. I heard you talking and laughing, and came here. Does it matter? Here is a gentleman alone, without a lady. I'll amuse him, if you like."

She drew a chair up to Ilia with an easy movement, sat down and asked,—

"Do you feel dull with them, tell me? They are making love to each other and you feel envious, yes?"

"It's not dull with them," said Ilia, feeling uncomfortable at her manner to him.

"That's a pity!" said the woman, calmly, turned away from Ilia and spoke, addressing herself to Vera. "Do you know, I went to evening service yesterday to the Virgin's monastery and saw in the choir such a nun—ah! A beautiful girl. I stood and looked at her all the time and thought: why did she enter a convent? I was sorry for her."

"I would not have felt sorry for her," said Vera.

"Oh! of course not! Do you think I believe you?"

Ilia drank in the sweet perfume of scent which was diffused in the air round the woman, looked at her sideways and listened to her voice. She spoke wonderfully calmly and in an even voice, and there was something in it that made you drowsy, while her words seemed to be full of the same pleasant and strong fragrance.

"Do you know, Vera, I keep wondering—shall I go to Poluektoff or not?"

"I don't know."

"Perhaps I shall go. Firstly, he's old; secondly, he's rich. But greedy. I ask him to put five thousand into the bank and pay me one hundred and fifty roubles a month, but he offers me three and a hundred."

"Lipochka! don't speak about it now," said Vera.

"All right, I won't," assented Lipa, calmly, and turned to Ilia again. "Well, young man, let's talk. I like you, you have a handsome face and grave eyes. What do you say to that?"

"I can't say anything," said Ilia, smiling in confusion, feeling that this woman was enveloping him like a cloud.

"Nothing? How dull you are. Who are you?"

"A hawker."

"Y—yes, I thought you were in a bank or else a shopman in some fine shop. You are very comely."

"I like cleanliness," said Ilia. He felt an oppressive heat and his head was dizzy from the scent.

"You like cleanliness? That's good. But are you sagacious?"

"What do you mean?"

"Have you guessed that you are one too many here, or not, yet?" asked the blue-eyed woman, calmly.

"Indeed! Well, I'll be off then!" said Ilia in confusion.

"Wait a bit! Vera, may I carry off this youth?"

"Take him, if he'll go!" said Vera, and laughed.

"Where to?" asked Ilia, troubled.

"Just you go, silly," cried Paul.

Ilia stood dazed, smiling disconcertedly, but the woman took him by the arm and led him away, saying calmly,—

"You're shy, but I'm capricious and self-willed. If I wanted to put out the sun, I'd climb upon the roof and begin blowing until I'd breathed my last. D'you see what sort I am?"

Ilia walked along with her, arm in arm, and did not understand and scarcely listened to her words, and felt only that she was warm and soft and fragrant.

CHAPTER XIV

AT first this intimacy, unexpected and sudden, took complete hold of Ilia, aroused in him a proud, triumphant feeling and seemed to have healed the wounds that life had made in his heart. The thought that a woman, beautiful and nicely dressed, gave him her expensive kisses of her own free will and did not ask for anything in return, lifted him still higher in his own eyes. His life went by as if he were floating down a broad river on a gentle wave, which caressed his body fondly, giving him courage and strength.

"Well, my dear caprice!" Olimpiada would say to him, playing with his curly hair or drawing her finger over the dark fluff on his upper lip. "I get to like you more and more. You have a strong, trusty heart, and I see that if you desire a thing, you have your will. That's good, I'm the same. And if I were younger I would marry you, and we'd go through life as smoothly as music." Ilia treated her with respect; it seemed to him that, in spite of her shameful life, she respected herself, and then she was clever. She never got tipsy, never used bad words, like other women he knew. Her body was as supple and strong as her strong, rich voice, and as graceful as her character. He liked her economy, her love of cleanliness and order, her clever way of talking about things and holding herself independently, even proudly. But sometimes when he came to see her, he found her in bed, lying with a pale face and dishevelled hair—and then an acute feeling of aversion to this woman would rise up in his breast, and he would look into her dim eyes, that seemed as if they were faded, severely and silently, without any wish even to say "good-morning."

She probably understood his feelings, and, wrapping herself up in the blanket, would say,—

"Go away from here! Go to Vera. Tell the old woman to bring some water and snow."

He would go to Vera's clean little room, and she, seeing his displeased and gloomy face, would smile quietly. Once she asked him,—

"Well, Ilia Yakovlich, does it prick sometimes?"

"Eh, Verochka!" answered he. "Your sins are like snow—you have only to smile, and they melt away."

"Poor fellows, both of you," said the girl, pityingly.

He loved Vera, and pitied her as he would pity a child, and was sincerely troubled when she quarrelled with Paul, and always tried to reconcile them. He liked to sit near her and watch her combing out her golden hair, or when she was sewing something and singing softly the while. Sometimes he read a deep sorrow in her hazel eyes and sometimes she smiled a hopeless and bitter smile. At such moments he liked her still more, he understood the girl's pain more clearly and tried to comfort her as well as he could; and she would say,—

"One can't live like this, one can't, Ilia Yakovlich. Just think! well, it does not matter for me. I'll remain besmeared, but why has Paul to suffer at my side?"

"That's his will."

"Is it his will?" asked the girl, like an echo.

Their talks were interrupted by Olimpiada, who appeared before them noiselessly, like a cold moonbeam, dressed in a loose, light blue dressing-gown.

"Come along, let's have tea, my caprice! And you come too, Verochka, afterwards."

Pink from the cold water, clean, strong and calm, she led Ilia away imperiously, and he followed her and wondered: was it really her he had seen an hour ago, worn out and soiled by dirty embraces.

At tea she would say to him,—

"It's a pity you are a peasant, and haven't had much learning. It's difficult to live. But nevertheless you must throw up your business and try something else. Wait a bit, I'll find you a situation. I want to set you up. When I go to Poluektoff I shall be able to do something for you."

"Well, does he give you the five thousand?" asked Ilia.

"He'll give them," answered the woman, with certainty.

"Well, if ever I meet him with you I'll flay him," said Ilia, with hatred.

"What for? He does not get in your way."

"But he is in my way."

"Nonsense! He's old and odious," said Olimpiada, mockingly.

"Joke away! I won't spare my hands, and the sin is not so very great to crush an old libertine."

"Wait at least till he's given me the money," laughed the woman.

The merchant gave her everything she wanted. Soon Ilia sat in Olimpiada's new lodgings, looking at the thick carpets, massive furniture covered with dark plush, and listened to the calm discourse of his mistress. He did not notice in her any great pleasure at the change in her circumstances, she was just as calm and even in her temper as before; it seemed she had only put on another dress and that was all.

"I'm twenty-seven, and when I'm thirty I shall have about ten thousand roubles. Then I'll send the old man about his business and—shall be free. Learn how to live from me, my grave caprice."

And Ilia learned from her how to gain one's end by an invincible firmness. But sometimes at the thought that she gave her caresses to another he felt as if he had received a gross insult, which crushed and abased him; and then the dream of owning a shop and a clean room, in which he could receive this woman, started up before him with greater vividness. He was not sure that he loved this woman, but she seemed to be indispensable to him as a clever and nice companion. And thus two or three months went by.

One day, coming home after the day's business, Ilia entered the shoemaker's cellar, and, to his amazement, saw Perfishka sitting at the table before a bottle of vodka, smiling happily, and opposite him—Jacob.

Leaning with his chest against the table, Jacob was shaking his head and saying unsteadily,—

"All right. If God sees everything—and knows all—He sees me. Everybody has abandoned me, brother, and I'm alone! My father does not love me—he's a rogue! He's a thief and a villain! Isn't that the truth?"

"Quite true, Yasha. It's sad, but true," said the shoemaker.

"There! how must one live? In what must one believe?" asked Jacob, shaking his dishevelled head, and moving his tongue with difficulty.

"I can't believe my father. Ilia has gone away. Masha—she's too little, is Masha. Where can I find somebody? Perfishka! there's nobody in the whole world."

Ilia stood in the door listening to his friend, and his heart contracted unpleasantly. He saw how Jacob's head was bobbing languidly and feebly on his thin neck, he saw Perfishka's dry yellow face lighted up with a blissful smile, and he could not believe that he was really looking at Jacob, gentle and quiet Jacob. He went up to him and asked reproachfully,—

"What are you doing here?"

Jacob started, looked into his face with frightened eyes, and, smiling wryly, exclaimed,—

"Ah, Ilia—it's nothing. I thought it was my father."

"What are you doing here, eh?" asked Ilia again.

"Ilia Yakovlich, leave him in peace," began Perfishka, getting up from his chair and staggering to his feet. "He's in his right. Thank God that he can drink."

"Ilia!" cried Jacob, hysterically, "my father—has beaten me."

"Quite true, I was witness," declared Perfishka, giving himself a blow on the chest. "I saw all—can swear to it! He's knocked out his teeth and broken his nose."

Jacob's face was indeed swollen and his upper lip was inflamed. He stood before his friend, and, smiling piteously, said,—

"Have they the right to beat me? I'm nineteen, I'm not guilty of anything."

Ilia felt that he could neither comfort his friend nor condemn him.

"What did he beat you for?"

Jacob moved his lips, wishing to say something, but did not. His face quivered and became distorted, he fell back on his chair, and, catching hold of his head with his hands, began to cry, swaying his body from side to side. Perfishka, having caught him when he fell, left him the same instant, and, pouring himself out some vodka, said,—

"Let him cry—it's good when a man can cry. Masha too—she's crying with all her might. She called out: 'I'll scratch his eyes out!' Ha, ha! I've sent her away to Matitsa."

"What happened between him and his father?" asked Ilia.

"I can tell you. It was all very strange. Terence, your uncle, began the row. He said to Petruha suddenly: 'Let me go,' says he, 'to Kiev, to the Saints.' Petruha was very glad; the hunchback has been a thorn in his flesh for a long time—and, to tell you the truth, Petruha is glad that Terence is going. A companion in business is not always agreeable—ha, ha! 'W-well, you can go,' says he, 'and put in a word for me, too, before the Saints.' Suddenly up starts Jacob. 'Let me go,' says he also."

Perfishka opened his eyes wide, made a furious grimace and drawled in a hollow voice,—

"W-what? You—to the Saints? How's that?' 'I want,' says Jacob, 'to pray for you too.' Petruha roared out, 'I'll show you how to pray!' But Jacob kept on, 'Let me go. A son's prayer,' says he, 'is acceptable to the Lord.' W-what a whack Petruha gave him on his mug! And then another and another."

"I can't live with him!" cried Jacob, "I'll go away! I'll hang myself! What did he pitch into me for? Ah! what for? I spoke from my heart."

Ilia was distressed with his cries, and he left the

cellar, shrugging his shoulders helplessly. The news that his uncle was going on a pilgrimage was agreeable to him; when his uncle was gone he would be able to go away from this house, too, at last, and take a small separate lodging—a small room—and live alone.

When he entered his room, Terence came in after him. His face was joyous, his eyes sparkled with animation, and, shaking his hump, he went up to Ilia and said,—

“Well, I’m going! Lord, how glad I am! it’s as if I were coming out of prison or out of a pit into the light. It means He won’t reject my prayer if He allows me to escape from here.”

“And do you know—about Jacob?” asked Ilia, drily.

“What?”

“He’s drunk.”

“Oh, oh, oh! That’s bad! Just like a little boy. And he asked his father to let him go with me too.”

“Did his father strike him before you?”

“Yes. Why?”

“Well, can’t you understand, that’s the reason he got drunk?” asked Ilia, sternly.

“Is that the reason? Just imagine, eh?”

Ilia saw that Jacob’s fate did not interest his uncle in the least, and this augmented his dislike for the hunchback. He had never seen Terence so joyful, and this joy, appearing before his eyes directly after Jacob’s tears, aroused in him an incomprehensible and uneasy feeling. He sat down near the window and said to his uncle,—

“Go to the eating-house.”

“The proprietor is there. I must speak to you.”

“Well, what about that?”

The hunchback came up to him and began speaking mysteriously.

“I shall get ready soon. You’ll remain here alone, and so—that means—”

“Well, speak out straight,” said Ilia.

“Straight! I’d be glad to,” blinking his eyes rapidly,

exclaimed Terence in a half whisper. "That is not easy either."

"Do you want to speak about me?"

"And about you too. But first—I've put aside some money, not much."

Ilia glanced at him and smiled nastily.

"What's the matter with you?" asked his uncle, starting.

"I know. Well, let us say you've put aside some money." And he pronounced the words "put aside" especially distinctly.

"Well, so," began Terence, without looking at him. "Well, that means I've decided to give two hundred roubles to the monastery."

"Ah!"

"A hundred to you."

"A hundred?" asked Ilia, quickly; and then he discovered that in the depths of his soul there lurked a hope of getting much more than a hundred from his uncle. He felt angry with himself for this hope, a wrong hope, he knew full well—and with his uncle for giving him so little. He got up from his chair, straightened himself, and said firmly and angrily,—

"I won't take your stolen money, d'you understand?" The hunchback drew back from him and sat down on his bed, piteous and pale. Shrinking together, with his mouth open, he looked at Ilia with fear in his eyes and was silent.

"Well, what are you looking at? I don't want it."

"Lord Jesus!" said Terence, hoarsely. "Wait a bit, dear."

"What then?"

"What?" asked Ilia, seeing that Terence could not articulate some word.

"Ilusha, you were like a son to me," began Terence, almost in a whisper, and sighing heavily. "I resolved to take this sin upon me—for you—for your future. Take the money, do take it! Or else the Lord won't forgive me."

"Tha-at's it!" exclaimed Ilia, mockingly. "You're going to God with the accounts in your hands? Oh,

dear! Did I ask you to steal grandfather's money? What a man you robbed!"

"Ilusha! you didn't ask to be born either," said his uncle, putting out his arm to him in a comical way. "No, you must take the money. For Christ's sake, for the sake of my soul's salvation. I'll come back and give it all to you. But in the meantime—this. My own one! The Lord will forgive me my sins if you take it."

He implored, and his lips trembled and fear flashed in his eyes. Ilia watched him and could not make out whether he was sorry for his uncle or not.

"All right, I'll take it," said he at last, and instantly left the room. His decision to take the money from his uncle was disagreeable to him, it lowered him in his own eyes; and what good was a hundred roubles to him? What could he do with them? The thought that if his uncle had offered him a thousand instead of a hundred he would change his troubled, dismal life at once for a clean one, which he would pass away from other people in peaceful loneliness. And what if he asked his uncle how much of the rag-picker's money had fallen to his share? But this thought seemed loathsome to him.

From the day that Ilia had made the acquaintance of Olimpiada, Filimonoff's house seemed still dirtier and more crowded to him. This dirt and squalor aroused in him a feeling of physical repulsion, as if cold, slimy hands were touching his body.

To-day this feeling oppressed him more than usual, he could find no resting-place in the whole house, and went to Matitsa without any particular purpose. As he mounted the stairs he felt a strange and awesome foreboding in his heart, that this house would one day push him on to something unexpected and dreadful.

With such thoughts he entered Matitsa's room and saw the woman sitting on a chair near her broad bed. She glanced up at him, and, shaking her finger, said in a loud whisper that sounded like the rustle of the wind,—

"Softly! She's asleep!"

Curled up on her bed slept Masha.

"How do you like that?" whispered Matitsa, opening her big eyes with a savage expression. "They've begun to massacre their own children like damned Herods! Massacre the innocents! May the earth fall away from under their feet!"

Ilia listened to her whispering, standing near the stove and looking at Masha's figure, wrapped up in something grey, and he wondered what would be the lot of this girl?"

"Do you know, he pulled Masha by her hair, the devilish thief, the dram-drinker! He's beaten his son and her too, and threatened to send them away, eh! Do you know that? But where can she go to, eh?"

"Perhaps I can get her a situation," said Ilia, thoughtfully, remembering that Olimpiada was looking for a maid.

"You!" said Matitsa, reproachfully. "You strut about here like a great gentleman. You're like a young oak, one gets no shadow nor acorns from you. You could have done so long ago. Are you not sorry for the child?"

"Wait a bit, don't fuss!" said Ilia, irritably, seeing that he had a good excuse for going to Olimpiada at once.

"How old is Masha?" he asked.

"Fifteen; how much do you expect? and what difference does it make if she is fifteen? Why, twelve's too much to give her, she's so fragile and thin, she's only a child yet, she's not a bit of use for anything. And what does she live for? It would be better if she could go on sleeping and wake up only when Christ comes."

Ilia went away with a mist before his eyes. In an hour's time he stood at the door of Olimpiada's house, waiting for it to be opened. But it was not opened for a long time, then a high, sour voice sounded behind it,—

"Who's there?"

"I," answered Luneff, in perplexity, not knowing who was asking him. Olimpiada's servant—an awkward woman marked with the smallpox—spoke in a rough, sharp way and opened the door without any questions.

"Who do you want?" was repeated behind the door.

"Is Olimpiada Danilovna at home?"

The door opened suddenly and the light streamed into Ilia's face; the youth stepped back, screwing his eyes up, unable to believe them.

In front of him stood a little old man with a lamp in his hand, dressed in a thick, broad, crimson dressing-gown. His skull was almost quite bare, only a small nimbus of grey hair surrounded his head from ear to ear, and on his chin a short, scraggy grey beard shook tremulously. He looked at Ilia's face and his sharp light eyes flashed mockingly, while his upper lip, covered with bristling hair, moved, and the lamp shook in his lean, dark hand.

"Who are you? Well, come in, come in, well?" said he. "Who are you?"

Ilia guessed who was standing before him. He felt the blood rush to his face, and an angry shame blazed up in his heart. So this was the man who shared with him the caresses of the clean, strong woman.

"I'm a hawker!" said he in a hollow voice, stepping over the threshold.

The old man winked at him with his left eye and smiled. His eyelids were red, without eyelashes, and in his mouth stuck out yellow, sharp bits of bone.

"A jolly hawker? Ha, ha! What hawker, eh?" asked the old man, putting the lamp close to Ilia's face and chuckling cunningly.

"A seller of trifles. I sell scent, ribbons, different trifles," said Ilia, with bent head, feeling dazed and seeing red.

"So, so, so—ribbons and trimmings—yes, yes, yes—ribbons and scent—beloved playthings. Well, what do you want, hawker, eh?"

"I want to see Olimpiada Danilovna."

"Ah, ah, ah! Her? Well, well; and what do you want her for, eh?"

"I have come for money that is due to me," said Ilia, with an effort.

He felt an incomprehensible fear of this nasty old

man and hated him. In his quiet, high voice and in his mocking eyes there was something that pierced Ilia to the heart, something insulting and abasing.

"Money? A small debt? All right!"

The old man suddenly drew the lamp away from Ilia's face, stood up on tip-toe and approached his flabby yellow face close to Ilia's, asking, with a venomous smile,—

"And where is your note? Give me the note."

"What note?" asked Ilia, full of fear, taking a step backwards.

"From your master. A note for Olimpiada Danilovna. You have it, haven't you? Give it me! I'll take it to her; well, well! be quick!" The old man kept drawing closer to Ilia, while the latter receded to the door, with his mouth parched with fear.

"I have not got any note," said he loudly, in despair, feeling that something quite incredible would happen. But the same instant behind them appeared the tall, well-shaped figure of Olimpiada. She glanced at Ilia calmly without any embarrassment over the old man's head, and asked in a calm voice,—

"What's going on here, Vasili Gavrilovich?"

"A hawker has come! You owe him something. You bought ribbons of him, and did not pay him, eh? Ha, ha! Well, now he has come, here he is."

The old man bustled about the woman, scrutinising first her face and then Ilia's. She put him aside with a lofty movement of her right hand, put the same hand into the pocket of her dressing-gown, and said to Ilia, severely,—

"Why couldn't you come at another time?"

"Yes!" cried the old man, shrilly. "Such a fool! Coming when you're not wanted, eh! Donkey!"

Ilia stood like one turned to stone.

"Don't shout, Vasili Gavrilovich! It is not good for you," said Olimpiada, and, turning to Ilia asked, "How much do I owe you, three roubles forty copecks? Here you are."

"And clear out!" cried the old man again. "Allow me, I'll shut the door myself—myself!"

He drew his dressing-gown closer around him, and, opening the door, called out to Ilia, "Go!"

Ilia stood before the shut door, out in the frost, and looked at it unseeingly, not understanding whether it was a dream or whether he had seen it all in reality. He held his hat in one hand and clenched the money Olimpiada had given him tightly in the other. He stood like this until he felt the frost encircling his head with an icy ring, and his feet began to ache with the cold. Then he put his hat on, thrust the money into his pocket and his hands into his coat pockets too, huddled himself together, and, with his head bent low, went slowly down the street with a sensation as if heavy balls were rolling about in his head and knocking at his temples, and in his breast his heart felt icy cold. The dark figure of the old man, with his yellow skull, floated before him in the air in a cold light. And the old man's face was smiling triumphantly, maliciously and slyly.

CHAPTER XV

THE day after his meeting with the old man Ilia walked about the High Street slowly and silently. He did not call out the names of his goods, but only looked at his box dully, and on his heart lay the same heavy and gloomy oppression. He kept picturing to himself the malicious look of the old man, the calm blue eyes of Olimpiada and the movement of her hand when she gave him the money the day before. In the cold, frosty air fluttered sharp little snowflakes, that pricked Ilia's face.

He had just passed a small shop, hidden modestly in the recess between the chapel and merchant Lukovin's enormous house. Above the entrance of the shop hung an old rusty signboard:—"Money changed by B. G. Poluektoff. Old silver, gold, image-trimmings, precious objects and old coins bought here." It seemed to Ilia, when he glanced at the shop door, that behind the glass stood the old man, and, smiling maliciously, nodded to him with his little head. Luneff felt an unconquerable desire to enter the shop and look at the old man closer. He found an excuse at once; like all hawkers, he kept the old coins that fell into his hands and, having collected a quantity, sold them to a money-changer, getting one rouble twenty copecks for one rouble's worth. At the present moment he had several coins in his pocket.

He came back, opened the door boldly, squeezed himself through with his case, and, taking his hat off, greeted the old man.

"Good health to you."

The old man was seated behind the narrow counter taking the trimmings off a holy picture, and picking out the nails with a small chisel. He was very much taken

up by his work. Glancing up at the youth for an instant, he bent his head over his work again and said drily,—

"Thank you. What do you want?"

"Haven't you recognised me?" asked Ilia.

The old man looked up at him again.

"Perhaps I have, but what do you want?"

"Will you buy some coins?"

"Show them."

Ilia pushed his case on to his back and plunged into his pockets for his purse; but his hand somehow could not find the pocket, and trembled, just as his heart was trembling, with hatred for the old man, and fear of him, and the desire of doing something quickly. Moving his hand about under the lapel of his coat, he looked steadfastly at the little bald head, and a shiver ran up his back.

"Well, will you be done soon?" suddenly asked the old man angrily.

"At once!" answered Ilia, quietly, with an effort.

At last he succeeded in getting out his purse; he came up close to the counter and emptied his coins on to it.

The old man glanced at them.

"Is that all? M-m."

And clutching at the silver with his thin yellow fingers, he began examining the money, saying under his breath,—

"Catherine, Ann, Catherine, Paul, the same, with a cross, thirty-two—m-m—the devil only knows what coin that is! Here—I won't take this one, it's quite effaced."

"But you can see by the size that it's a twenty-five copeck piece," said Ilia, sternly.

"As a fifteen-copeck piece I'll take it."

The old man threw the coin aside, and, opening a drawer in the counter with a quick movement, began rummaging about in it.

An anger, hard as iron, seized Ilia; he swung out his arm and his hard fist came down with a blow on the old man's temple. The money-changer fell against the

wall, giving his head a hard blow, but immediately he was up again, flung himself against the counter, and, catching hold of it with his hands, stretched out his thin neck towards Ilia. Luneff saw his eyes flashing out of his little dark face, his lips move, and heard his loud, hoarse whisper,—

“For love’s sake, for love’s—”

“Oh, you rascal,” said Ilia, quietly, and caught hold of the old man’s neck with disgust. He clutched it and began shaking it, while the old man put his hands against Ilia’s chest and gasped. His eyes became prominent and red, tears flowed from them, his tongue hung out of his dark mouth, and moved as if it were mocking the murderer. The warm saliva spurted on to Ilia’s hand, while in the old man’s throat something rattled and whistled. Cold hooked fingers seemed to clutch Ilia’s neck, he clenched his teeth and flung his head back, shaking the old man’s light body again and again, and holding him in the air. If someone had begun beating Ilia from behind at this moment, he would not have let go of the old man’s throat, which was crunching in his fingers. With a burning hatred and dread in his heart he saw Poluektoff’s dim eyes grow bigger and bigger, and pressed his throat harder and harder; and, as the old man’s body became heavier, the heaviness in Ilia’s heart seemed to melt away. At last he pushed the money-changer from him, and the old man fell softly on to the counter. Then Luneff looked round; all was quiet in the empty street, and a heavy snow was falling. On the floor at Ilia’s feet lay two pieces of soap, a purse and a reel of cotton. He reflected that these things had fallen from his case, picked them up and put them back in their place. Then, leaning over the counter, he looked at the old man; the latter was lying huddled up in the narrow recess between the counter and the wall; his head hanging on his chest and only the shiny outline of it was visible. Ilia’s eyes fell on the open drawer in the counter—golden and silver coins and packets of paper money caught his eyes. Trembling with joy, he caught up hurriedly first one packet, then another, and another,

hid them in his shirt and looked round once more, full of fear.

He went out into the street without hurrying, and stopped about three paces from the shop, where he covered his goods carefully with the oilcloth and went on again through the dense mass of snow that was falling from invisible heights. Around him and within his breast was a cold, dense gloom. He strained his eyes, trying to pierce it; suddenly he felt a dull pain in his eyes, and, touching them with the fingers of his right hand, stopped in terror, as if his feet had suddenly frozen to the ground. It seem to him that his eyes had started out of his head like old Poluektoff's, and that they would always remain like that, protruding painfully, unable ever to shut themselves again, and everyone would be able to read his crime in them. They seemed to be dead. Feeling the pupils of his eyes with his fingers, he felt a pain in them, but could not lower his eyelids, and his breath grew short with terror. At last he managed to shut his eyes; he rejoiced in the darkness which enveloped him all of a sudden, and stood motionless, breathing deeply and seeing nothing. Someone pushed him. He looked round quickly, a tall man in a short fur cloak passed him. Ilia looked after him till he disappeared in the dense swarm of white snowflakes. Then, putting his hat on straight, Luneff walked along the pavement, feeling a pain in his eyes and a heaviness in his head. His shoulders shook, he clenched his fingers involuntarily, while a headstrong and reckless feeling began to rise up within him and dislodge his fear.

When he got to the crossing, he saw the grey figure of the policeman, and unaccountably and slowly, very slowly, he went straight up to him. He went with his heart sinking within him.

"What a mass of snow," said Ilia, coming up close to the policeman and looking at him fixedly.

"Y-yes, it's coming down! Now, the Lord be praised it will be warmer," answered the policeman, with a feeling of pleasure. His face was big and red, with a great deal of hair on it.

"And what time is it now?" asked Ilia.

"We'll have a look!" The policeman shook the snow from his sleeve and put his hand inside his coat. Luneff experienced a mingled feeling of fear and pleasure in standing before this man. He suddenly burst out laughing in a curious unnatural way.

"What are you laughing at?" asked the policeman, forcing the lid of his watch open with his nail.

"How you are covered with snow!" exclaimed Ilia.

"I should think so, such an amount coming down. It's half-past one now, five minutes to the half-hour. It will cover me, brother. You, here, will go to an eating-house now, into the warmth, while I shall have to stick here till six o'clock. Look, what a load you have on your case."

The policeman sighed and shut his watch with a click.

"Yes, I'm going to an eating-house," said Ilia, and, smiling wryly, added, "There, to that very same one."

"Well, don't worry."

In the eating-house Ilia sat down near a window. From this window he knew one could see the chapel, next to which was Poluektoff's shop. But now everything was hidden by a white mist of snow. He looked fixedly at the flakes flying past the window and falling to the ground, where they covered everything with a thick mantle. His heart beat fast, but strongly and easily. He sat, his mind a blank, and waited for what would happen next, while the time moved slowly on. When the waiter brought him his tea, he could not restrain himself from asking,—

"How is it outside in the street, not very bad?"

"It's warmer, much warmer!" answered the waiter, hurriedly, and ran away, and Ilia began to wait again, feeling that he was tired out and falling into a semi-drowsy state. He poured himself out another glass of tea, but did not drink it, and sat motionless. Then he suddenly felt hot, he began to undo the collar of his coat, and, touching his chin with his fingers, gave a shudder. It seemed to him that those were not his fingers, but someone else's, cold and hostile ones.

Lifting his hand to his face, he began to examine the fingers intently—they were clean, but Luneff thought it would be better to wash them with soap.

"Poluektoff is murdered!" suddenly someone cried out. Ilia jumped up from his chair as if he had been summoned by the cry; but the whole eating-house was in a commotion; everyone was making his way to the door, putting on his hat as he went. He threw a ten-copeck piece down on the tray, put the strap of his case over his shoulder and hurried after the others.

Near the money-changer's shop a great crowd was gathered, policemen bustled about crying out in a pre-occupied way, and amongst them was the bearded one with whom Ilia had spoken. He was standing at the door, not allowing the people to enter the shop, looking at everyone with frightened eyes, and kept on stroking his left cheek, which was redder than the right one. Ilia stopped in full sight of him and listened to what the crowd was saying. At his side stood a tall, black-bearded merchant with a stern face, who was listening, with knitted brows, to the animated tale of a little grey old man in a cloak lined with fox fur.

"The boy thought that he was in a faint, and ran after Peter Stephanovich, asking him to come to them, as the master was ill. Well, he came along at once, gave one look and saw he was dead. There's a go! No, just think—what daring! In the middle of the day, in such a busy street. Well, I never!"

The black-bearded merchant coughed loudly and said in a thick, surly voice,—

"God's hand is in this. It means the Lord did not accept his penance."

Luneff made a step forward, meaning to look at the merchant's face again, and pushed him with his case.

"Hullo!" cried the merchant, pushing Ilia aside with his elbow, and looking severely into his face. "What are you after?"

And then turned again to the old man.

"It is said: not a hair of your head will fall without God's will."

"There is no gainsaying that," assented the old man,

nodding his head, and then added under his breath, with a wink, "Everybody knows God puts a mark on a rogue. Lord, forgive me! It's sinful to talk like this, but it's difficult to hold one's tongue—yes!"

"And remember what I say," continued the stern merchant. "The man who is guilty of this sin will never be found, you'll see."

Luneff smiled. Listening to this conversation, he felt a strength and courage that was awesome, but nevertheless agreeable, rising in his breast, and if anyone had asked him at that moment,—

"Did you strangle him?"

It seemed to him that he would have answered fearlessly and firmly,—

"I did."

He squeezed himself through the crowd with the same feeling in his breast, and stopped near the policeman. The latter glanced at him, pushed him angrily in the shoulder and cried,—

"Where are you going? What business have you here, eh? Be off!"

Ilia staggered and fell against someone. He was pushed again and a voice cried out,—

"Give it him on his neck!"

Then Luneff got out of the crowd and sat down on the steps of the chapel, laughing inwardly at all the people. Through the rustle of the snow, caused by many feet, and the low hum of voices, separate phrases reached him:—

"And he must needs make all this mess, when I'm on duty, the villain."

"He was the first in the town for discounting bills."

"Oh, oh!"

"The snow is coming down, the shop is in a recess. I can't see anything."

"He skinned one without any pity."

"But he was a human being all the same, one feels sorry."

"Oh course. He can be pitied too."

"All are hungry and greedy."

"Look! his wife has come."

"Ah, ah!"

"Oh, the miserable woman!" sighed a tattered peasant loudly. Luneff got up on his feet and saw a middle-aged stout woman in a cloak and black shawl descending with difficulty from a broad sledge, with a bear-skin cover. A police-sergeant and another man with red whiskers were supporting her under the arms.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" sounded in the air her trembling and frightened voice. Everyone was quiet. Ilia looked at the old woman and thought of Olimpiada.

"And has he no son?" asked someone in a low voice.

"In Moscow, they say."

"I expect he was only waiting for this."

"Of course!"

Luneff listened to these remarks and his heart contracted within him. It was agreeable to him to hear that no one was sorry for Poluektoff, but at the same time all these people, with the exception of the black-bearded merchant, seemed to him to be stupid and even repugnant. In the merchant there was something strict and truthful, while all the others stood like stumps in a forest and spoke spiteful words with malicious tongues.

CHAPTER XVI

ILIA waited until the small body of the money-changer was carried out of the shop, and then went home, chilled with the cold and tired out, but calm. At home, locked up in his room, he counted the money; in two thick packets of small papers there were five hundred roubles, and in a third eight hundred and fifty roubles. There was also another small packet of coupons, but he did not count these, and, wrapping up all the money in a piece of paper, began thinking, with his elbows on the table, of a place where he could hide it?

Thinking it over, he felt a great heaviness in his head and a strong desire to go to sleep. He decided to hide the money in the attic, and went up at once, holding the packets openly in his hand. In the entrance he came upon Jacob.

"Ah! you've come back already," said Jacob.

"Yes, I'm back."

"How pale you are! Don't you feel well?"

"N-not quite."

"What are you carrying there?"

"This?" asked Ilia, looking at the money; and, then suddenly, shuddering from the fear of betraying himself, he said hurriedly, waving the packets in the air, "This is tape—nothing much—trifles."

"Will you come to drink tea?" asked Jacob.

"I? Yes, I'll come in an instant."

And he went quickly through the entrance with an unsteady gait, his head dizzy and heavy, like a drunkard's. Going up the stairs to the attic, he stepped softly, afraid of making a noise, and afraid of meeting anyone. When he was burying the money, in the earth near the chimney, he suddenly imagined that

someone was hiding in the corner of the attic in the darkness and watching him. He felt a desire to throw a brick in that direction, but remembered himself in time and descended quietly. He felt no more fear, he seemed to have hidden it away together with the money in the attic, but he was sorely perplexed.

"Why did I strangle him?" he asked himself.

When he entered the cellar, Masha, who was busy near the stove over the samovar, met him with a joyous exclamation,—

"Oh! Why are you so early to-day?"

"The snow," answered he; and the same instant called out irritably,—

"It isn't early! I've come back the same as usual, it's my time. What a silly! Can't you see it's quite dark?"

"It's dark here in the middle of the day. What are you calling out for?"

"I'm calling out because you're just like a detective, asking questions: why are you so early? where are you going? what are you carrying? Why, what does it matter to you?"

Masha looked at him fixedly and said reproachfully,—

"Oh, dear, Ilia, how haughty you have grown."

"Ah! the devil take you," swore Luneff, and sat down to the table. Masha gave an offended sniff, turned her back on him and began blowing into the chimney of the samovar. Slight and small, she kept shaking her black curls and screwing up her eyes from the smoke. Her face was thin; black rings round her eyes made them look more lustrous, and there was something about her which made her resemble one of those flowers that grow up in an obscure corner of a garden, amid weeds. Ilia watched her and thought: this little girl lives all alone in a pit, works like a grown-up person, has no pleasures, and will scarcely ever have one in her whole life, but will keep on living like this, cooped up in dirt. While he—if he wants to—will live as he had wished to for a long time, in peace and cleanliness. He experienced a feeling of pleasure at this thought, but at the same time had

a sensation of guilt before Masha. He called out to her in a low and kind voice,—

“Masha!”

“Well, what do you want—spiteful?” responded she.

“Do you know—I’m—a bad fellow,” said Luneff, and his voice broke, while in his heart a question fluttered, like a bird in its cage: “shall I tell her or not?”

She straightened herself and glanced at him with a smile.

“There’s nobody to beat you, that’s what it is. You booby!”

“No, wait a bit!” exclaimed Ilia.

“There’s nothing to wait for,” said Masha, and coming up hastily to him, she spoke hurriedly and entreatingly,—

“Listen, Ilusha, darling! ask your uncle to take me with him, eh? Do ask! I’ll bow down to the ground before you, really, I’ll bow down.”

“Where to?” asked Ilia in a tired voice, taken up with his own thoughts and not understanding her words.

“With him, dear! Do ask.”

She folded her hands together and stood before him as if he were a holy image, while tears gathered in her eyes.

“It would be so nice,” said the girl, with a sigh. “In the springtime, across the fields and through the forests. I’d just go on and on, I think of it the whole day long and see myself in my dreams walking on and on. Darling! How nice it would be for me. He’ll listen to you—tell him he must take me. I won’t eat his bread, I will beg. People will give to me—I’m little. Ilusha! if you like, I’ll kiss your hand.”

And suddenly she caught hold of his hand and bent over it. Ilia pushed the girl away from him and jumped up quickly from his chair.

“Fool!” he cried, “how can you? I—have strangled a man.”

He grew frightened of his own words and added quickly,—

"Perhaps—perhaps I have done such a deed with my hand—and you want to kiss it."

"It does not matter," said Masha, coming up close to him. "And I would kiss it—what's there so wonderful in that? Petruha's worse than you, and I kiss his hand for every bit he gives me—I feel disgusted, but he orders me to—'Kiss it,' says he. And then feels me all over and pinches me—the shameless creature."

Whether it was because Ilia had spoken dreadful words, or whether it was because his secret was still his, but suddenly he felt a great light-heartedness and joy. Smiling, he said to the girl in a kind and low voice,—

"All right, I'll arrange it for you. By God! I will. You'll start on this pilgrimage. And I'll even give you some money for your journey, and I'll tell my uncle to give you some too."

"Darling!" cried Masha, and, jumping up, put her arms round his neck.

"Let me alone! Wait a bit," said Luneff, seriously. "I've told you—you shall go. Pray for me, Mashutka."

"And for whom else, in the name of the Lord?"

Jacob appeared in the door, and asked Masha in astonishment,—

"What are you screeching about? One can hear you in the yard."

"Yasha!" cried the girl, joyfully, and, gasping for breath, began telling Jacob,—

"I'm going, so good-bye. Here, he has promised to ask the hunchback, he'll entreat him."

And Masha laughed.

"Do you think you'll get his consent?" asked Jacob of his friend, thoughtfully.

"And why not? She won't be in his way. And it will do her good. See, what she looks like, she's more like mould than a human being."

"That's it," said Jacob, and after a moment's silence whistled.

"What's the matter?" asked Ilia.

"I'm lost. I'll have to live all alone—alone, like the moon in the sky."

"Hire a nurse," advised Ilia, with a sneer.

"I'll take to drinking vodka," said Jacob, shaking his head.

Masha looked at him, and, bending her head, went to the door. From thence sounded her sad and reproachful voice,—

"How weak you are, Jacob!"

"And you're strong. You go and abandon a fellow. Devils! And if I feel lonely without you?"

He sat down to the table gloomily opposite Ilia and said,—

"What if I went away too, quietly, with Terence? Eh?"

"Go. I'd go."

"You! But my father will put the police on my track."

All were silent. Then Jacob spoke with a make-believe merriment,—

"It's good, brothers, to be drunk. One doesn't understand anything, one doesn't think of anything. It's jolly." Masha put the samovar on the table and said, shaking her head,—

"Oh, you shameless fellow."

"Here, hold your tongue," cried Jacob, angrily. "Your father's the same as if he did not exist: does he hinder you from living?"

"Oh, my life is very fine," replied Masha. "I'd run away and never look back, if I could, from such a life."

"It's bad for everybody," said Ilia, quietly, and grew thoughtful again.

"It would be nice to go away from everything. To sit down somewhere near a wood, by a river, and think it all over."

"What a fool's way of going away from life," said Ilia, with disdain.

Jacob looked into his face fixedly and said, with a sort of fear,—

"Do you know, I've found a book."

"What book?"

"An ancient book. It's bound in leather, looks like

the Book of Psalms, and it must be a heretic book, I bought it of a tartar for seventy copecks."

"What's the title?" asked Ilia, indifferently. He did not feel inclined to speak at all, but he felt it was embarrassing and even dangerous to be silent, and he compelled himself to ask questions of his friend.

"The title is torn off," said Jacob, lowering his voice, "but it's about the beginning of matter. It's difficult to read, and dreadful. It's written, that Thales of Militus was the first to ask what the beginning of matter was: He named it water and said everything was and is derived from it; and God was named by Thales the Thought, which derived things from the water. And then there was Diagorus the godless; 'he did not conceive any God'—that means he 'did not believe in God.' And Epicureus, he said: 'Truth is God, but He does not give anything to anybody, does not do any good and has no solicitude over anything.' That means—God exists, but has nothing to do with us—men, that's how I understand it. Consequently, you can live as you like. Nobody takes any care of you."

Ilia rose from his chair and, knitting his brows sternly, interrupted his friend's slow discourse, and said,—

"I'd like to take that book and give you a good box on the ears with it."

"What for?" exclaimed Jacob, with astonishment and anger.

"So that you should not look into it any more. Fool! And the one who wrote the book was another fool!" Luneff went round the table, bent over his friend, who was seated, and began speaking with passionate wrath, rapping out the words like a hammer on Jacob's big head.

"God exists. He sees all, knows all. There's nothing but Him! Life is given to us as a trial, sin—as a test, to see if we will abstain or not! If we don't, a punishment will overtake us, just wait. Don't expect it from men, but from Him, do you understand? Wait and expect it."

"Stop!" cried Jacob. "I didn't mean to say that."

"It does not matter. Stop! What kind of a judge are you, eh?" cried Luneff, pale with excitement and an incomprehensible anger which suddenly seized him. "Not a hair from your head will fall without His will. Have you heard that? And if I have sinned, it's His will. Fool!"

"Have you gone mad?" cried Jacob, with fear, pressing against the wall. "Into what sin have you fallen?"

Luneff heard the question through the din in his ears, and it acted like a douche of cold water. He looked suspiciously at Jacob and Masha, who was frightened too by his excitement and cries.

"I only said so as an example," said he in a hollow voice, and sat down in his place.

"You seem to be unwell," said Masha, timidly.

"And your eyes are dim," added Jacob, observing his face.

Ilia touched his eyes involuntarily and said quietly,—

"It's nothing, it will pass."

After a while he began to feel uneasy and oppressed by his friends' society, and, refusing tea, he went to his room.

Just as he lay down on his bed, Terence came in. From the moment that the hunchback had decided to go and do penance for his sin, a radiant and blissful expression shone in his eyes, as if he felt a foretaste of the joy of being freed from his sin. Quietly, with a smile on his lips, he came up to his nephew's bed, and, pulling at his scraggy beard, began speaking in a kind voice.

"I saw you had come home, and I said to myself: I'll go and have a talk with him. It's not much longer that we'll be together."

"Are you going?" asked Ilia, drily.

"As soon as it gets warmer I shall start. I should like to get to Kiev for the Passion Week."

"Listen! take Masha with you."

"Get along with you!" exclaimed the hunchback, waving his hand.

"Listen," said Ilia, firmly. "There's nothing for her

to do here, and she's of such an age—Jacob, Petruha, and so on, you understand? This house is like a trap for everybody, a cursed house! Let her go, perhaps she won't come back."

"But how can I take her?" began Terence, piteously.

"Take her, take her!" repeated Ilia, with insistence. "And keep your hundred for her, I don't need your money. And she will pray for you. Her prayer means a lot."

The hunchback grew thoughtful and repeated,—

"Means a lot, m-yes. What you say is quite true. The money I can't take from you, we'll leave that, as we decided. And as for Masha, I must think about it."

Then Terence's eyes suddenly flashed joyously, and, bending down to Ilia, he began whispering with animation.

"Well, brother, what a man I saw yesterday! The celebrated Peter Vasilich Lisoff, the expounder of the Gospel—have you heard of him? A man of unspeakable wisdom! It must have been the Lord Himself Who sent him to me, to lighten my soul of the wicked doubt in God's mercy unto me, a miserable sinner."

Ilia lay silent. He wanted his uncle to go away and leave him as quickly as possible. With half-closed eyes he looked out of the window and saw in front of him the high dark wall of the outhouse.

"We talked about sin and the salvation of the soul," whispered Terence, with animation. "He said to me: 'Just as a stone is necessary to sharpen the bluntness of a chisel, so is sin necessary to man to quicken his soul and humble it to the dust at our All-merciful Lord's feet.'"

Ilia glanced at his uncle and asked, with a malignant smile,—

"Does this expounder of the Gospel of yours resemble the devil?"

"How can you speak like that?" exclaimed Terence, starting back from him. "He is a pious man. His fame is spreading wider than even your grandfather's—oh, brother!"

And, shaking his head reproachfully, the hunchback began smacking his lips.

"Oh, all right!" said Ilia, roughly and with enmity. "What else did he say?"

And he suddenly laughed in a dry and disagreeable way. His uncle moved away from him, astonished, and asked,—

"What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing. He said it cleverly, that expounder of the Gospel of yours. It just fits me—oh, you devil! I think just the same exactly!"

He was silent, looked at his uncle fixedly and turned towards the wall.

"And he said," began Terence again in a timid voice, "'sin,' he said, 'gives the soul wings of penitence on which it rises to the throne of the Almighty.'"

"Do you know, you look like the devil yourself!" Ilia interrupted him all of a sudden, and again laughed softly.

The hunchback tossed his arms, like a big bird its wings, and sank back frightened and angry; but Luneff sat up on his bed, gave his uncle a push in the side and said sternly,—

"Move a bit!"

Terence jumped to his feet quickly and moved to the middle of the room, shaking his hump. He looked at his nephew, who was sitting on the bed, holding on to it with his hands, with his shoulders raised and his head bent low down.

"But if I don't want to repent?" said Ilia, presently. "If I say to myself: I did not wish to sin, everything happened of its own accord—everything is in God's will, what have I to trouble about? He knows all, directs everything. If it was not necessary to Him—He would have kept me back. But He did not keep me back, consequently I'm in the right. All people live in sin, but who repents? Well, what do you say to that?"

"I don't understand what you're saying, Christ be with you!" said Terence, dolefully, and sighed.

Ilia smiled.

"If you don't understand, don't talk to me—yet."
And he lay down again, saying to his uncle,—

"I don't feel well."

"I noticed something was wrong."

"I should like to go to sleep—go away—and I'll go to sleep."

When Ilia was alone he felt as if a whirlwind were raging in his head. The events of the last few hours were strangely jumbled in his mind; it seemed to him as if they were fused into a flame which burned his brain. He felt as if he had been ill for a long time, and had strangled the old man not that day, but some time long ago.

He shut his eyes and lay motionless, while in his ears sounded the old man's shrill voice,—

"Well, will you be done soon?"

And then the rattle.

"For love's sake—for love's—"

The black-bearded merchant's stern voice was intermixed with Masha's entreating one; the ancient words in Jacob's heretic book got jumbled with the discourse of the expounder of the Gospel. He felt as if everything were swaying and rocking around him, and he was being dragged downwards. He was not afraid, but only longed for peace, he wanted to go to sleep and forget everything. And at last he did fall into a sleep. When he awoke the next morning he knew it was a bright and frosty day, by seeing the wall opposite the window lighted up. His head was still dizzy, but his heart was calm. He remembered everything that had happened the day before, and, listening to his inner self, he dimly felt that he had already decided upon his conduct. Half an hour later he was walking along the brightly-lighted street with his case round his neck, and, screwing up his eyes, dazzled by the snow, observed calmly all the people he met. When he passed a church he crossed himself. He crossed himself before the chapel, which was next to Poluektoff's closed shop, and went on feeling neither fear, nor pity, nor anything disquieting. At dinner-time, seated in an eating-house, he read about the daring murder of the money-changer,

in the papers. Coming to the words, "the police have taken energetic measures to find the culprit," he shook his head with a smile, for he was quite certain the offender would never be found until he desired it himself.

CHAPTER XVII

THAT same evening a servant came from Olimpiada and brought Ilia a note, in which was written:—

“Be at the corner of Kusnetski Street, near the public baths, at nine o'clock.”

Having read it, he felt a shudder and contraction within him, as if from cold. Before him rose the disdainful face of his mistress and in his ears sounded her sharp and offensive words,—

“Why couldn't you come at another time?”

He looked at the note and could not understand what Olimpiada wanted him for. He felt afraid to understand, and his heart began to beat anxiously. At nine o'clock he came to the appointed place, and when, among the many women who were walking in pairs and alone, he saw Olimpiada's tall figure, his trouble became still greater. Olimpiada had an old coat on and her head was wrapped in a shawl, so that Ilia could see only her eyes. He stopped silently in front of her.

“Come along!” she said. And added quickly in a low voice,—

“Hide your face in your collar.”

They went along the corridor of the baths, hiding their faces, as if ashamed, and quickly disappeared in a separate compartment. Olimpiada threw off her shawl at once, and, seeing her calm face, pink from the frost, Ilia felt his courage coming back, and yet to see her so calm was disagreeable to him. The woman sat down on the sofa at his side, and, looking lovingly into his face, said,—

“Well, my caprice, soon you and I will be dragged before the coroner.”

“What for?” asked Ilia, wiping the frost, which had melted on his moustache, with the palm of his hand.

"What a silly he seems to be!" exclaimed the woman, quietly, with a sneer.

Then she knitted her brows and said to Ilia seriously in a whisper,—

"Do you know, a detective came to me to-day? What do you say to that?"

Ilia glanced at her and said coldly,—

"Listen! what you and your detectives do doesn't concern me in the least. Say straight out—what did you call me here for, with such precautions?"

Olimpiada looked into his face, and, smiling disdainfully, said,—

"Ah! that's it, is it?—you're offended! Well, I can't pay any attention to that now. Listen: when you're called before the coroner and he begins to question you as to when you made my acquaintance, if you saw me often, tell everything that has happened, the truth, in detail, d'you hear?"

"Yes, I hear," said Ilia.

"Stop! If you're asked about the old man—you've never seen him. Never. You don't know anything about him. You did not know that I was kept by anyone. Do you understand?"

The woman was looking at Ilia impressively and angrily; and he felt something burning hot, but pleasant, palpitating within him. It seemed to him that Olimpiada was afraid of him; he wanted to torment her a bit, and looking into her face with screwed up eyes, he began to smile without saying a word. Olimpiada's face quivered and grew pale, she drew away from him and asked in a whisper,—

"What's the matter? What are you looking at me like that for, Ilia, Ilia?"

"Tell me," he said, showing his teeth, "why should I lie? I saw the old man at your house, you know I saw him!"

And, leaning against the marble-topped table, he continued slowly and quietly, but with sorrow and anger, which had suddenly seized him,—

"I looked at him then and said to myself: so this is the man who is standing in my way, who has

crossed my life. And if I did not strangle him then—”

“You lie!” said Olimpiada, loudly, knocking the table with the palm of her hand. “You lie! He did not stand in your way.”

“How is that?” asked Ilia, sternly.

“He did not stand in your way. If you had wished he would not have been there. Did I not hint to you, did I not say to you, that I could send him away whenever I liked? You were silent and only laughed, you never really loved me. You, by your own will, shared me with him—shameless creature!”

“Stop! Be silent!” said Ilia. He had risen from the sofa to his feet and sat down again, feeling as if this woman had given him a heavy blow with her reproach.

“I don’t want to be silent,” said she, loudly. “Young and strong, and loved by me, and what have you done for me? Did you ever say to me: ‘well, Olimpiada, choose, he or I?’ Did you ever say that? No, you’re just like all the other men.”

Ilia quivered with rage, the room grew dark before his eyes, he clenched his fists and rose to his feet.

“Wait a bit. How can you?”

“Ah! you want to beat me. Beat away,” said the woman, ominously, with flashing eyes, and showing her teeth. “Well, give me a blow, and I will open the door and cry out that it was you who killed him at my urgency—well, beat me!”

Ilia was frightened at first; but the fear only gave his heart a prick and disappeared. He felt a difficulty in breathing, as if invisible hands were holding his throat.

He sat down on the sofa once more and, after a moment’s silence began laughing in a choky way. He saw Olimpiada was biting her lips and seemed to be looking for something in the dirty room, full of the warm smell of steaming wood and soap. She sat down on the sofa near the door, and, with her head bent low, said,—

“Laugh away, laugh away, devil!”

"And I will."

"When I saw you, I said to myself: this is he, he will help me."

"Lipa," said Ilia in a low voice.

She did not answer and sat motionless.

"Lipa!" repeated Luneff, and, with a feeling as if he were falling over a precipice, said slowly,—

"But it was I who strangled the old man, by God it was!"

She shuddered, and, lifting up her head, stared at him with wide-open eyes. Her lips quivered and she said with difficulty, as if she were choking,—

"Fool, you are afraid."

Ilia saw that it was she who was frightened at his words and did not believe them. He got up went over to her and sat down by her side, smiling in a hopeless way. She suddenly caught hold of his head, pressed it to her breast, and, kissing his hair, began speaking in a thick, hoarse whisper.

"Ilushka, Ilushka! Why do you wrong me? I was glad he was strangled, the old snake!"

"It was I who did it," said Ilia, nodding his head.

"Be silent!" exclaimed the woman, anxiously. "I am glad he is strangled, I wish they all were! All that ever touched me. You are the only one worthy man, the first I ever met in my whole life, my darling."

Her words kept drawing Ilia closer to her, he pressed his face against the woman's breast, and although it was difficult for him to breathe, he could not tear himself away, feeling that she was the only friend he had, and that he needed her now more than ever.

"When you look at me angrily, my clean one, fresh and strong as a young oak, I feel my shameful life and love you. I love you for your pure pride."

Heavy tears fell on to Luneff's head and, feeling them, he began to cry himself easily and gently.

She pushed his head away from her breast, and, kissing his wet eyes, and cheeks, and lips, said,—

"I know you are not disdainful of my beauty, but you do not love me with your heart, and condemn me. You can't forgive me my life—and the old man."

"Don't talk about him," said Ilia. He wiped his face with the shawl off her head and got up quite calm.

"What must happen will happen," he said firmly and quietly. "If God wants to punish a man He'll find him anywhere. Thank you, Lipa, for your words. You spoke the truth and I'm guilty before you. I thought you—were different—but you're all right. I'm to blame."

His voice broke, his lips quivered and his eyes were bloodshot. Slowly, with a trembling hand, he smoothed his dishevelled hair, and suddenly tossing his arms he began to wail.

"I'm to blame for it all. Why? Oh, devil."

Olimpiada caught hold of his hand, he dropped on to the sofa at her side and said,—

"You understand I strangled him, I. Do you believe me? It was I."

"Not so loud," whispered Olimpiada in terror. "What are you thinking of?"

She put her arms round him tightly, looking into his face with eyes that had grown dim with fear.

"Wait a bit. It happened by accident; God knows all. I did not want to. I wanted to look once more upon his vile face, and entered his shop. I had nothing in my thoughts. And then suddenly the devil pushed me on, and God did not interfere. It was a pity I took the money. I ought not to have—heigho!"

He heaved a deep sigh of relief, feeling as if a load had fallen from his heart. The woman was astounded by his tale; shuddering, she pressed him closer to herself, and murmured in a broken, disconnected whisper,—

"It is good that you took the money. That means robbery, without that they would think it was jealousy, and then—"

"I sha'n't repent," said Ilia, thoughtfully. "I don't want to. Let God punish me. Men cannot judge. How can they be judges? I don't know any sinless people. I have not met one. I shall wait."

"Lord!" said Olimpiada, with a sigh. "What is this? What is going to happen? Darling, I can't do anything—neither speak nor think. We must go away from here, it's time."

She rose, staggering as if she were tipsy. But, having wrapped her head up in her shawl, she suddenly began to speak quite calmly.

"What shall we do now, Ilusha? Shall we perish?"

Ilia shook his head negatively.

"So—you'll tell the coroner all, as it was—that is to say not all, but—"

"Yes. Do you think I don't know how to stand up for myself? Do you think I shall go to Siberia for that old man and his two thousand? Not quite, I have not said my last word in this business. Do you understand?"

He was flushed with excitement and his eyes flashed. The woman bent down to him, asking in a whisper,—

"There were only two thousand?"

"Two and something, the devil!"

"Poor fellow, and in that even you did not succeed," said the woman, sadly, and tears gathered in her eyes.

Ilia looked into her face, and, smiling bitterly, said,—

"Oh, dear, do you think it was for the money? Can't you understand? Stop! I will go away first. The man is always the first to go."

"Come and see me soon, we must not hide. Come soon!" Olimpiada said, with distress.

They kissed long and passionately, and then Luneff went. In the street he hired an *isvoschik*, and while he was driving along kept looking back to see if anyone were following him. His talk with Olimpiada had calmed him and aroused in him a kind feeling towards the woman. She had not stung him by word or look when he confessed the murder, and had not pushed him away, but seemed to take half the sin on herself; and yet, a minute before, not knowing anything, she had wanted to ruin him and would have done it too, he saw it in her face. Thinking of her, he smiled lovingly, but he experienced the sensations of an animal tracked by hunters.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE next morning Petruha met him in the eating-house, and gave a scarcely perceptible nod in answer to his greeting, looking at him fixedly in a strange way. Terence, too, kept looking at him and sighing, without saying a word; but Jacob beckoned him into Masha's den, and said with fear in his eyes,—

"Yesterday evening a police-officer came and kept asking my father about you. What does it mean, eh?"

"What did he ask?" asked Ilia, calmly.

"Different things. How you live? If you drink vodka—about women too. He named some Olimpiada or other. Do you know her?" asked Jacob. "What does it mean?"

"The devil knows!" said Ilia, and went away.

That evening he got another note from Olimpiada. She wrote:—

"I was questioned to-day about you. I told everything in detail. It is not at all terrible and very simple. Don't be afraid. Kisses to you, dear one."

He threw the note into the fire. In Filimonoff's house and in the eating-house everyone was talking about the murder. Ilia listened to the different tales and they afforded him a strange pleasure. He liked to go among these people, who were interested in his deed, and question them about the details which they had invented themselves, conscious of the power of being able to astonish them all by saying,—

"It was I who did it."

Some admired the murderer's cleverness and courage, others were sorry that he had not had time to take all the money, others again were afraid he would be caught; no one was sorry for the merchant, no one said a single kind word about him, and the fact that

Ilia did not find any pity for the murdered man in anyone aroused in him a feeling of anger towards them, although he himself did not feel any pity for the merchant either. He did not think about Poluektoff at all, but only of his great sin and the retribution awaiting him. This thought, however, caused him no distress; it lay quite still within him and seemed to become part of his soul. It was like a swelling caused by a blow—it did not ache if no one touched it. He firmly believed that the hour would strike and the punishment would come from God, Who knows everything and does not forgive the offender; and this calm, firm readiness to accept his punishment any day or hour made Ilia feel almost the same as he did before the murder. He was only more cautiously observant of people and took more notice of anything bad that was in them; it gave him pleasure, although he did not consciously try to justify himself.

He became more and more morose and wrapped up in himself, and walked about the town with his goods from morning till night, sat in eating-houses, observing people and lending an attentive ear to their discourses, as he had always done. One day he remembered the money that was hidden in the attic, and decided that he must hide it somewhere else, but the next instant he said to himself,—

“It isn’t necessary. Let it lie there. If the place is searched and it’s found, I’ll confess.”

But there was no search made, and for a time he was not called before the coroner. At last on the sixth day he was summoned. Before going to the coroner’s office he put on clean linen and his best clothes, cleaned his boots till they shone, and took an isvoschik. The sledge jumped on the hollows of the road, while he tried to keep quite straight and motionless, because all within him was strained to the utmost degree, and it seemed to him that if he were to move unwarily something evil would happen to him; and he mounted the stairs to the coroner’s office without hurrying and as carefully as if he were dressed in glass.

The coroner was a young man with curly hair and a

hooked nose and wore gold spectacles. When he saw Ilia he rubbed his thin white hands together, and took off his spectacles and began wiping them with his handkerchief, observing Ilia's face with his big dark eyes. Ilia bowed to him silently.

"Good-morning! Take a seat, here," and he indicated with a wave of his hand a chair near a big table covered with a crimson cloth. Ilia sat down and carefully pushed away with his elbow some papers, which lay near the edge of the table. The coroner noticed this and politely removed the papers, then sat down to the table opposite Ilia and began turning the pages of a book in silence, glancing at Ilia from under his eyebrows. The silence was disagreeable to Ilia, and, turning away from the coroner, he began looking round the room, seeing good furniture and real cleanliness for the first time. The walls were hung with portraits and pictures in frames; in one of these Christ was represented walking along thoughtfully with his head bent low, sorrowful and lonely, amid ruins; at his feet lay dead bodies and arms, while in the background rose a cloud of black smoke—something was burning. Ilia looked at this picture for a long time, trying to understand what it meant; he even wanted to ask, but at this juncture the coroner shut his book noisily. Ilia started and looked at him. The coroner's face wore a reserved, dull expression, while his lips stuck out in a comical way, as if he were offended with something.

"Well," said he, rapping his fingers on the table. "Ilia Yakovlich Luneff, if I'm not mistaken?"

"Yes."

"Do you guess what I have summoned you for?"

"No," answered Ilia, with a sidelong glance at the picture.

In the room all was quiet, clean and pretty; never before had Ilia seen such cleanliness and so many pretty things. A smell of some pleasant scent came from the coroner; all this diverted Luneff's attention and quieted him, though it made him feel envious.

"This is one way people live. I suppose it's

profitable to catch thieves and murderers. I wonder what his salary is?" thought Ilia.

"No!" repeated the coroner, as if he were astonished. "Why! did not Olimpiada Petrovna tell you anything?"

"No, I have not seen her for a long time."

The coroner leant back in his chair and pouted his lips again in a comical way.

"How long?"

"I don't know—about—eight or nine days, perhaps."

"Aha! Tell me, did you meet old Poluektoff many times at her house?"

"The old man who was murdered?" asked Ilia, looking into the coroner's eyes.

"Yes, yes! The very same."

"I did not meet him once."

"Never? M-m."

"Never."

The coroner flung out his questions swiftly with an assumed carelessness, and when Ilia, who answered without hurrying, was particularly slow with his reply, the official rapped his fingers impatiently on the table.

"Were you aware that Poluektoff kept Olimpiada Petrovna as his mistress?" asked he, suddenly, looking over his spectacles into Ilia's eyes.

"No," answered the other in a hollow voice.

"Yes, he kept her as his mistress," repeated the coroner in an irritable voice. "In my opinion that's very bad," added he, seeing that Ilia was not going to say anything in reply.

"Of course, there's nothing good in it!" said Ilia, under his breath.

"Am I not right?"

But Ilia did not answer again.

"Have you known her a long time?"

"More than a year."

"That means you knew her before she got acquainted with Poluektoff?"

"You're a clever dog!" thought Ilia, and answered calmly,—

"How can I know, as I was not aware that the dead man kept her as his mistress?"

The coroner pursed his lips, whistled, and began looking over a paper. Luneff again began to stare at the picture, feeling that his interest in it helped him to be calm. The merry ringing laugh of a child reached them from somewhere; then a woman's voice, joyful and loving, began singing slowly:—

"Soinka, deary! sweetheart, darling!"

"That engraving seems to interest you a great deal?" sounded the coroner's voice.

"Where is Christ going?" asked Ilia in a low tone.

The coroner looked into his face with dull, disappointed eyes, and, after a silence, said,—

"Ah, you see, He has descended to the earth to see how men have fulfilled His teaching. He is walking over a battle-field and sees men around him lying dead, houses in ruins, fires and robberies."

"But couldn't He see it all from heaven?" asked Ilia.

"M-m. It is what is called an allegory—it is painted to make a stronger impression on you, e—e to show you the incongruity between actual life and Christ's teaching of it. But I must ask you a few more questions."

Ilia turned from the picture and began looking into the coroner's face. Again the official poured forth a stream of trivial inconsequent questions, which bothered Ilia like flies in autumn. He grew tired of them and felt that they were diverting his attention and that his watchfulness was being dulled by their empty monotony. He grew angry with the coroner, understanding that he was tiring him on purpose.

"Can you tell me," asked the coroner, quickly and carelessly, "where you were on Thursday between three and four?"

"In an eating-house, drinking tea," said Ilia.

"Ah! In which? Where?"

"In 'Plevna.'"

"Why do you say that you were in the eating-house just at that time with such preciseness?"

The coroner's face quivered, he bent over the table, and his flashing eyes seemed to clutch hold of Luneff's eyes. Ilia was silent for a few seconds, then sighed and answered without haste,—

"Before going into the eating-house, I asked the time of a policeman."

The coroner threw himself back in his arm-chair again, and, taking up a pencil, began rapping it against his nails.

"The policeman told me that it was past two—twenty minutes, I think it was," said Ilia, slowly.

"Does he know you?"

"Yes."

"You have no watch of your own?"

"No."

"Did you ever ask him the time before?"

"Sometimes."

"The town council is not far and there is a clock on the tower."

"One forgets to look."

"Were you a long time in 'Plevna'?"

"Until they cried out about the murder."

"And then where did you go?"

"To look at the murdered man."

"Did anyone see you there—near the shop?"

"The same policeman—he even sent me away—pushed me."

"That is very good!" exclaimed the coroner, with approval, and, not looking at Luneff, asked carelessly,—

"Did you ask the policeman the time before or after the murder?"

Ilia understood the question. He turned round sharply in his chair, feeling an anger against this man with his dazzling white shirt, his slender fingers with clean nails, his golden spectacles and his sharp dark eyes. He answered with a question,—

"How can I know?"

The coroner gave a dry cough and rubbed his hands so as to make his fingers crack.

"Splendid!" he said in a displeased voice. "Magnificent. Yes."

And he stretched himself wearily in his arm-chair.

"Good. A few more questions and I'll let you go. H'm—what is the policeman's name?"

"Eremin, Matvei Ivanovich."

The coroner now spoke in a dull voice, without haste, and apparently not expecting to hear anything interesting; and Ilia answered him and kept waiting for a question like the question about the time. Each word that he pronounced sounded in his breast as if it had resounded in empty space and struck there a tightly stretched chord. But the coroner did not ask any artful questions.

"When you went along the street that day do you remember meeting a tall man in a short cloak and black fur cap?"

"No," answered Ilia, gloomily.

"Well, listen to your deposition and then sign it."

And hiding his face with a paper covered with writing, the coroner began reading quickly in a monotonous voice, and having finished gave Luneff a pen. Ilia bent over the table, signed the paper, rose slowly from his chair, and, looking at the coroner, said firmly in a hollow voice,—

"Good-bye."

The other answered only by a disdainful, lordly nod, and bending over the table began writing. Ilia stood still. He wanted to say something to this man who had tormented him for such a long time. In the stillness could be heard the scratch of the pen and from the inner room a song reached them :—

"Dance away, dance away, little dolls."

"What is the matter?" asked the coroner, suddenly lifting up his head.

"Nothing," answered Luneff in a surly tone.

"I told you you could go."

"I'm going."

"That's right."

They were looking fixedly at each other, and Luneff

felt something rising in his heart, heavy and terrible. Turning quickly to the door, he went out into the street and there, caught in a cold wind, he suddenly became conscious that his whole body was damp with perspiration. Half an hour later he was with Olimpiada. She opened the door to him herself, having seen him drive up to the house, and met him with a motherly joy. Her face was pale, while her eyes had grown bigger and wore an anxious expression.

"You're a wise fellow!" she exclaimed, when Ilia told her that he had come straight from the coroner. "That's quite right! Well, what did he say?"

"He's a rascal!" said Ilia, viciously. "He set traps."

"He can't do otherwise," said the woman, reasonably. "Let him be. That's his vile business."

"Couldn't he say outright—So-and-So, you're suspected?"

"But you were not straightforward either," said Olimpiada, with a smile.

"I?" said Luneff, with astonishment. "Y-yes, indeed! Oh, devil!" He was greatly struck with something, and after a silence said,—

"But while I sat before him, by God! I considered myself in the right. And—generally—"

"Well, thank God!" exclaimed Olimpiada, joyfully, "all ended well."

Ilia glanced at her with a smile and said slowly,—

"And do you know, I hadn't to lie at all scarcely. I'm in luck, Lipa!"

And he laughed in a strange way.

"The detectives keep a sharp eye on me," said Olimpiada in a whisper, "and on you too, probably."

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed Luneff, with a sneer. "They are sniffing about and want to surround me like a wolf in a forest. Nothing will come of it, it is not their business! And I'm not a wolf, but a miserable human being. I did not want to strangle anyone, fate is strangling me, as it's said in Pashka's poetry. And it's strangling Pashka, and Jacob, and everybody."

"Never mind, Ilusha," said the woman, making tea, "everything will come right in the end."

Luneff got up from the sofa, went to the window, and, looking into the street, continued gloomily and doubtfully,—

"All my life I've had to poke my nose into all sorts of abomination. I've been pushed on to all that I don't like and hate. I've never met anyone I could look upon with joy. Is it possible that there is no cleanliness in life? There, I strangled that one, what good is it to me? I have only soiled myself and harrowed my heart. I took the money, I ought not to have taken it."

"Don't grieve," Olimpiada comforted him. "One hasn't the heart to be sorry for him."

"I'm not sorry, I want to justify myself. Everyone tries to justify himself, because one must live! The coroner there lives like a bug in a rug. He won't strangle anybody. He can live righteously, surrounded by cleanliness."

"Wait a bit, and we'll go away from this town together."

"N-no, I won't go anywhere!" said Luneff, firmly, turning towards the woman. And as if threatening someone he added, "No, wait a bit! I shall wait and see what will happen next."

Olimpiada grew pensive for a minute. She was seated at the table before the samovar, superb and beautiful, in a loose white dressing-gown.

"I shall keep up the fight," said Luneff, walking about the room and nodding his head impressively.

"Ah!" exclaimed the woman in a hurt voice, "you don't want to go away because you are afraid of me? You think I'll get you into my power for ever now, you think that if I know about you I'll take advantage! You're mistaken, my fine fellow! I won't drag you after me by force."

She spoke calmly, but her lips quivered as if with pain.

"What are you saying?" asked Luneff, listening to her words.

"I sha'n't constrain you, never fear! Go where you like, please!"

"Wait a bit!" said Ilia, sitting down by her side and

taking hold of her hand, "I don't understand why you began to speak like this?"

"Go on pretending!" cried Olimpiada, with anger, snatching her hand out of his. "I know—you are proud and cruel! You can't forgive me the old man, and my life is repugnant to you. You say to yourself now, that it all happened through me—you hate me."

"You're lying!" said Ilia, proudly. "You're lying. I don't blame you for anything. I know that pure and sinless women don't exist for the likes of us, they're too expensive for us. One must marry them and they bear children. Everything that is pure exists for rich people only, and only what is used and sucked dry and fly blown by handling is left for us."

"Well, leave me alone, if I'm soiled by handling!" cried Olimpiada, jumping up from her chair. "Go away!" but tears started to her eyes and she began flinging words at him that burnt like hot coals,—

"I got into this pit by my own free will, because there is a lot of money in it, I'll climb back with the help of this money—use it as a ladder—and begin to live again decently, you have helped me in this. I don't love the virtue in you, I love your pride, your youth, your curly head and strong arms, your stern eyes, your reproaches are like knives plunged into my heart, for all this I shall be grateful to you to my dying day, I will kiss your feet—there!" She fell at his feet and began kissing his knees, exclaiming,—

"God is witness! I sinned for my own salvation, it is His will that I shall not live my whole life in filth, but only pass through it and become pure again. I shall pray till He forgives me, I don't want to languish all my life! They've soiled me all over, they've polluted me entirely, all my tears won't be enough to wash myself clean."

At first Ilia tried to push her from him, and to make her rise from the floor, but she had caught hold of him tightly, and, with her head on his knees, rubbed her face against his legs, speaking all the time in a hollow, choking voice. He began stroking her with a trembling hand, and, lifting her from the floor, put his arms round

her and her head on his shoulder. The woman's hot cheek touched his, and, kneeling before him, held in his strong arms, she kept speaking, lowering her voice to a whisper,—

"Is anybody the better if a man, having sinned once, is debased for his whole life? When I was a little girl and my stepfather kept making up to me with his filthiness, I gave him a blow with the chopper. I did not want to. But they mastered me, they drugged me. I was a little girl—pure, and as firm as an apple, and rosy. I cried over myself, I was sorry for myself, and my beauty. And I didn't want to, I didn't want to. And then I saw it was all the same. There was no returning. 'I'll at least be expensive,' said I to myself. I hated everybody, I stole money and drank till I got tipsy. Before I met you I did not kiss anybody with my soul, but only marred myself."

She finished in a low whisper and suddenly tore herself out of Ilia's arms.

"Let me go!"

But he pressed her tighter in his arms and began kissing her face passionately and despairingly.

"Let me go—you hurt me!" she said once more.

"I have nothing to say in answer to your words," began Ilia, hotly. "Except that nobody is sorry for us. Well, and we need not grieve for anybody. You spoke well, let me kiss you at least. How else can I repay you? My own dear one, I love you, I can't say how much! One can't express it in words."

Her words and complaints aroused in him a sincere warm feeling of affection towards her. Her grief seemed to melt the barrier between them and bind them closer together. Clapsed tightly in each other's arms they told each other their wrongs in low voices for a long time; and a firm and resolute courage grew up in Luneff's heart.

"There won't be any happiness for us two," said the woman, shaking her head despairingly.

"Well, we'll celebrate our unhappiness then. If we have to go to Siberia—we'll go together. Do you hear? And for the present let's forget grief, and

everything but our love. I don't care what happens, burn me with fire if you like. My soul is light, I don't want to repent of anything!"

Agitated by their talk and excited by their mutual caresses, they seemed to see each other through a haze. They grew hot with embracing, and felt suffocated by their clothes.

Outside the sky was grey and dull. A cold mist covered the earth, settling down on the trees in a white rime. In the front garden under the window the branches of a young birch tree rocked gently, shaking off the snowflakes. A winter evening was closing in.

CHAPTER XIX

A FEW days later Luneff heard that in the affairs of Poluektoff's murder the police were looking for a tall man in a sheepskin cap. When the murdered man's shop was inspected, two silver image trimmings were found and it appeared that they had been stolen. The boy who served in the shop testified that these trimmings had been bought, two or three days before the murder, from a tall man in a short coat, called Andrew, that this man had sold Poluektoff different silver and gold things from time to time, and that Poluektoff had lent him money. Afterwards it turned out that, both on the day before and the day of the murder, a man who answered to the boy's description had been revelling in a brothel.

Every day Ilia heard something new about the case; the whole town was interested in the daring murder and it was talked about everywhere—in eating-houses and in the street. But all this talk scarcely interested Luneff at all; all thought of danger had dropped away from his mind, like the crust off a wound, and in its place he only felt an awkwardness. Lending an attentive ear to everything that was said about the crime, he had only one thought in his head: how was he going to live? What awaited him in the future? And his certainty that the murderer would not be found grew stronger.

He felt like a raw recruit before the battle, or like a man starting on a long and unknown journey. He wanted more than ever to live in solitude for a time, to meditate upon himself, but life boiled around him, like water in a kettle, and nearly every day something happened to divert his thoughts from himself. He grew pale and thin. For some days he was worried by

Jacob, who, dishevelled and dressed anyhow, wandered aimlessly about the eating-house and yard, looking at everything in a distracted way with wandering eyes, like a man occupied by some mental calculation. Meeting Ilia, he would ask him in a low voice or in a whisper, mysteriously and hurriedly,—

“Have you time to have a talk with me?”

“Wait a bit, I’m busy.”

“Oh, dear! it’s important.”

“What is it?” asked Ilia.

“A book! It explains things, fit to scare one,” said Jacob, fearfully.

“Get along with your books! Better tell me why your father looks at me in that savage way? But what was going on in actual life did not catch Jacob’s notice. In answer to his friend’s question he opened his eyes wide in perplexity and asked,—

“Why? I don’t know anything. That is to say, I heard once—he was speaking to your uncle—something about you selling false money—but he only said it at random.”

“And how do you know that he said it at random?” asked Ilia, with a smile.

“Well, what’s the good of bothering? What money? It’s all bosh.” And, waving his hand, Jacob began to muse.

“Have you time for a talk?” asked he, after a minute, looking his friend up and down with wandering eyes.

“About the book?”

“Y-yes. There is one place, that I understood—ouf-f, brother mine.”

And the philosopher made a grimace, as if he had burnt himself. Luneff looked upon his friend as a queer or even crazy fellow. Sometimes Jacob seemed to him to be blind, and always miserable and quite unfit for life. The inhabitants of the house said—and everyone who lived in the same street knew—that Petruha wanted to marry his mistress, who kept one of the most expensive brothels in the town, but Jacob was quite indifferent to this; and when Luneff asked him if

the wedding were going to take place soon, Jacob asked,—

“Whose?”

“Your father’s.”

“Ah! Who can say—there’s a shameless man for you! A nice wife he has found himself—fit only to be spit upon!”

“And do you know that she has a son—a big one, he learns in the gymnasium?”

“No, I didn’t know—why?”

“So—he’ll be your father’s heir.”

“Aha!” said Jacob, indifferently. And then he suddenly brightened up.

“A son, do you say?”

“Why, yes.”

“A son—perhaps that will be to my advantage, eh? If only my father would appoint this son to stand behind the counter and let me go wherever I like,—if!”

And as with a foretaste of his liberty, Jacob smacked his tongue with relish. Luneff looked at him regretfully and said, with a sneer,—

“It’s quite true what they say, that when a silly child begs for a carrot, and bread is given him, he does not open his bag for it. Oh, you! I can’t think how you’ll get through life.”

Jacob pricked up his ears, opened his eyes wide and answered in a whisper,—

“I have thought over it all and I know. First of all, a man must put his mind in order. He must see clearly what God wants of him. Now I see one thing, all men are entangled like threads and are pulled in all directions, but in what direction each must be drawn, and to what he must attach himself most tightly—no one knows. A man is born no one knows why, and lives no one knows what for; then death comes and tears everything asunder. Consequently first of all I must know what I am ordained for. There!”

“How you do get into these arguments of yours,” said Ilia, with intensity. “What is the good of them?” He felt that Jacob’s obscure discourses touched him more deeply than before, and aroused strange thoughts

in him. It seemed to him that the black power, which was always bidding defiance to his simple happy thoughts about a clean life, listened to Jacob's words with an exceptional greed, and stirred in his soul, like an infant in its mother's womb. This was disagreeable to Ilia, it disconcerted him and seemed quite unnecessary, and he tried to avoid talking to Jacob; but it was not easy to shake off his friend.

"What good is it? The very greatest. Being without knowing is the same as being without fire. Where are you going, eh? One must always know where one is going and what for, and if it's true."

"Jacob, you're like an old man, one feels dull in your company. In my opinion—if a pig seeks luck much more does a man—as they say. Well, good-bye."

After such conversations, he felt as if he had been eating too many salt things; a distressing thirst seemed to seize him and he longed for something to quench it. The thought that God was preparing a punishment for him blazed up in a flame and burnt his soul; he sought solitude and could not obtain it; so he went to Olimpiada and in her arms hid himself from all his thoughts and trouble.

Sometimes he went to see Vera. The loose life was gradually sucking the girl down into its deep, filthy slough. She told Ilia with rapture about revels with rich merchants, bureaucrats and officers, about sledge-parties and restaurants. She showed him the presents she had received from her lovers—dresses and jackets. Plump, well-shaped and strong, she boasted with pride of her adorers, who disputed and quarrelled for the possession of her. Luneff admired her health, beauty and gaiety, but remarked cautiously several times,—

"You'll come to grief, Verochka, in this game."

"And what does it matter? It is my fate. I'll go down with a flourish at least. I will take as much as I can and then—let the end come."

"Well, but Paul—"

At the name of her lover her brows knitted and her gaiety disappeared.

"If he would only leave me," she said. "It's hard

for him with me, and he torments himself in vain. If he would only be satisfied with what there is, but he wants all. But I shall not stop, the fly has found the treacle."

"Don't you love him?" asked Ilia.

"One cannot do otherwise than love him," replied she, quite seriously. "He is wonderful."

"Well, then, why don't you live together?"

"With hi-im? To be a burden to him? Why, he can scarcely earn bread enough for himself, how can he keep me? No, I pity him."

"Take care something bad does not happen—he has a spirit of his own!" Luneff warned her. But she laughed.

"He? He's quite soft. I can bend him as I like."

"You'll break him."

"O Lord!" exclaimed Vera, irritably. "Well, what am I to do? Do you imagine I was born for one person only? Everybody wants to live merrily. And everybody lives for himself—as he likes. He, and you, and I."

"That's not quite true!" said Ilia, thoughtfully and gloomily. "We all live—but not for ourselves only."

"And for whom, then?"

"You—for merchants and different rakes."

"I'm a rake myself," said Vera, and burst into a merry laugh.

Luneff left her with a sad feeling. During this period he met Paul once or twice, but only for a short time. When Paul found his friend with Vera, he frowned and got angry. In Luneff's presence he sat silent, with clenched teeth and two red spots burning on his cheeks. Ilia saw that his friend was jealous of him, and this was agreeable to him. But he saw, too, clearly, that Gratchoff had got his neck into a loop, from which it was very doubtful if he would get loose without great damage to himself. And, feeling sorry for Paul, and still more so for Vera, he ceased going to see her. With Olimpiada he was living his honeymoon over again. But here, too, a coldness sprang up now and then that made Ilia's heart contract. Sometimes

in the middle of a talk he would suddenly grow thoughtful and gloomy. Then Olimpiada would say lovingly in a whisper,—

“Dear one! don’t think about it. There are few people in this world whose hands are unsoiled.”

“Listen,” Luneff answered coldly and seriously. “I ask you never to talk to me about that. I’m not thinking of my hands, but of my soul. Although you have sense you can’t understand my thoughts. Just tell me—what must I do to live honestly and in cleanliness, in peace and without injuring anyone! M-yes. And hold your tongue about the old man.”

But she could not be silent about the old man and kept persuading Ilia to forget about him. Luneff would grow angry and leave her; and when he made his appearance again, she cried out in a rage that he loved her out of fear and out of charity, and that she did not want such love, and would throw him over and leave the town. And she cried and pinched Ilia, bit his shoulders, kissed his feet, and then, throwing off her clothes in a frenzy, stood up before him naked and said,—

“Am I not fair enough? Is my body not beautiful? I love you with each little vein, with all my blood. Kill me—and I shall only laugh.”

Her blue eyes grew dark, her lips quivered, and her breast rose, as if it were striving to meet Ilia. He took her in his arms and kissed her with all the strength he had, and then, going home, thought: how could she, being so passionate and full of life, how could she suffer the vile caresses of the old man? And Olimpiada seemed repugnant and pitiful, and he spat on the ground with disgust, remembering her kisses. Once, after a burst of passion, sated with her caresses, he said,—

“Since I strangled the old devil you seem to love me more.”

“Why, yes—what of it?”

“Nothing. It amuses me when I think there are such people who like a rotten egg better than a fresh one, and others who like to eat an apple when it has begun to rot—it’s queer!”

“Every moment has its whim, and everybody has

his own ways and taste; some prefer an officer, and others a water-melon."

And they both grew thoughtful.

One day when Ilia had come home from town and was undressing, Terence came quietly into his room. He closed the door after him carefully, but stood near it several seconds, as if he were listening to something, and then, shaking his hump, fastened the hook. Ilia noticed all this and looked into his face mockingly.

"Ilusha!" said Terence in a half whisper, sitting down on a chair.

"Well?"

"Rumours are afloat. They speak badly of you."

And the hunchback sighed heavily, lowering his eyes.

"For instance?" asked Ilia, taking off his boots.

"Different people say different things. Some—that you had a share in this business—the merchant who was murdered. Others—that you sell false coins."

"Are they envious, then?" asked Ilia.

"Men came—men that looked like the secret police, that's to say like detectives, and kept asking Petruha about you."

"Well, let them," said Ilia, indifferently.

"Of course. What have we to do with them, if we have no sin on our conscience?"

Ilia laughed and lay down on his bed.

"Now, they have left off and don't come any more. But Petruha has begun himself," said Terence, disconnectedly in a timid voice. "He keeps whispering, does Petruha. It would be better if you changed your lodgings, Ilusha, if you could find a room and live in it, yes! As it is, Petruha says, 'I can't,' says he, 'keep suspected people in my house; I,' says he, 'am a member of the town council.'"

Ilia turned a face dark with anger towards his uncle, and said loudly,—

"Listen. If his polished face is dear to him, he'd better hold his tongue. You can tell him so. If I hear a disrespectful word about me, I'll pound his head into gravel. Whoever I may be, it is not his business, the

rascal, to judge me. And I'll leave this place when I like. For the present, I sha'n't go away. I want to live a little bit longer with people who are pure and righteous."

The hunchback was frightened by Ilia's wrath. He was silent for a minute, sitting on his chair and scratching his hump softly, and looked at his nephew with big eyes full of fear and expectation. Ilia stared at the ceiling with firmly-closed lips and wide-open eyes. Terence looked him all over carefully; at his curly head, handsome grave face, with its small moustache and sharp chin, glanced at his broad chest, measured his whole strong and well-shaped body with his eyes, and said quietly, with a sigh,—

"What a fine fellow you have grown! In our village all the girls would run after you in a flock. If only we could return to the country!"

Ilia was silent.

"M-yes, you'd have a fine life there! I'd obtain some money for you, and you could open a shop and marry some rich girl! Ha, ha! And your life would fly like a sledge downhill."

"But perhaps I want to go uphill?" said Ilia, gloomily.

"Why, of course, uphill!" Terence said hastily. "I only spoke like that—I meant your life would be easy, but it will go uphill."

"And from the top of the hill where will it go?" asked Ilia.

The hunchback glanced at him and laughed with a jarring sound. Then he again began speaking, but Ilia did not listen to him. He was thinking of all he had gone through and how cleverly and imperceptibly everything is arranged in life, like the threads of a net. Circumstances surround a man and lead him where they will, just as the police leads a rogue. For instance, he had wanted to leave this house and live alone, and a favourable occasion turns up at once. He looked fixedly at his uncle with fear in his eyes, but the same minute someone knocked at the door, and Terence jumped up in dismay.

"Well, open the door," said Ilia, angrily, in a loud voice.

When the hunchback undid the hook, Jacob appeared on the threshold with a big yellow book in his hands.

"Ilia, you just listen, let's go to Mashutka," said he, excitedly, coming up to the bed.

"What's the matter with her?" asked Ilia, hastily.

"With her? I don't know. She's not at home."

"Where has she taken to wander of an evening?" asked the hunchback in a nasty way.

"She goes out with Matitsa," said Jacob.

"Well, she won't come to any good in her company," said Terence, slowly.

"Never mind. Come along, Ilia."

Jacob had caught Luneff by the sleeve and was pulling at it.

"Wait a bit," said Luneff. "Have you broken loose from a chain?"

"Do you know, it is black magic and nothing else," said Jacob in a half whisper.

"Who?" asked Ilia, putting on his boots.

"This same book, by God! You'll see, come along. I tell you beforehand, it's wonderful," continued Jacob, leading his friend through the dark entrance-hall. "It's even fearful to read, it draws you in like a bog." Ilia felt his friend's excitement, heard his trembling voice, and, when they entered the shoemaker's room and lighted the lamp, he saw that Jacob's face was pale and his eyes were dim and merry, like a drunkard's.

"Have you been drinking?" asked he, looking suspiciously at Jacob.

"I? No, I haven't had a single drop to-day; I don't drink now, only occasionally for courage, when my father is at home, I swallow a glass or two, but not now. I'm afraid of my father, I only drink what does not smell of vodka. But let's drop it—listen." He sat down on a chair noisily, opened the book, bent low over it, and, drawing his finger over the thick paper, yellow from age, began reading in a hollow, quivering voice:—

"Chapter the third. The primitive state of man'—listen!"

With a sigh he lifted up his left hand, while he moved the finger of the right one over the page, and began reading loudly: "It is narrated that in the opinion of virtuous men—do you hear?—of virtuous men, who wrote about the beginning of matter, that the primitive state of man, as Diodor testifies, was twofold. Some thought that the world was not created and is imperishable and mankind has no beginning in the ages."

Jacob lifted up his head from the book, and, shaking his hand in the air, said in a whisper,—

"Do you hear? has no beginning!"

"Read on!" said Ilia, looking suspiciously at the old book, bound in leather. Then Jacob's low and enraptured voice sounded again.

"Of this belief, as Cicero testifies, were Pythagoras of Samos, Archytas the Tarentine, Plato of Athens, Xenocrates, Aristoteles the Stagyrte, and many other peripatetics believed the same, and taught that everything that exists and will exist in the world has no beginning—do you hear? again—has no beginning! But there is a certain round of things, that give birth and are born, in which the beginning and end of the thing born is accessible to our knowledge."

Ilia put out his hand, and, shutting up the book, said with a sneer,—

"Throw it up! The devil take it. Here some Germans have been philosophising: accessible to our knowledge, indeed! It's impossible to understand anything."

"Wait a bit!" exclaimed Jacob, looking round in a scared way, and gazing with wide open eyes at his friend's face, asked softly,—

"Do you know your beginning?"

"What beginning?" cried Ilia, angrily.

"Don't cry out. Let's take the soul, for instance. Man is born with a soul, isn't he, eh?"

"Well?"

"Then he must know—from whence he appeared and how? It is said that the soul is immortal, it always existed—aha! Wait, wait a bit! It is not

necessary to know how you were born, but how you lived. When did you live? When did you understand that you were alive? You were born living, but when did you become alive? In your mother's womb? All right! But why can't you remember how you lived before your birth, and even for five years after your birth you don't know anything about your life? Well? And if there's a soul—where does it enter you? Well?"

Jacob's eyes flashed triumphantly, his face was lit up by a glad smile, and he cried out with a joy that seemed strange to Ilia,—

"There's a soul for you!"

"Fool!" said Ilia, looking at him sternly. "What are you so glad about?"

"But—I'm not glad about anything in particular. I'm just glad."

"That's good; simply glad! Take my advice—throw the book away. You see it's written against God. It's not so important to know why I'm alive as to know how I am to live? How am I to live so as to have everything clean and agreeable and so that no one interferes with me and I injure nobody? Find me book in which all this is explained."

Jacob sat with his head bent low down, silent and thoughtful. His joyous excitement had disappeared, finding no response. After a silence, he said in answer to his friend,—

"I keep looking, and there is something I don't like in you. I don't understand your ideas—but I see that since a certain time you have grown proud of something. You behave as if you were righteous somehow."

Ilia laughed.

"What are you laughing at? It's true. You judge everyone severely. You don't love anybody, as if—"

"I don't love anybody," said Ilia, firmly. "Whom have I to love? What for? What have people given me? Everyone wants to ride after his piece of bread on somebody else's neck, and then he says: 'love me, respect me!' I'm not such a fool! Respect me—and

then I'll respect you! Give me my share—perhaps I will love you then! Everyone wants to eat."

"Well, I expect it isn't only victuals people are after," replied Jacob, crossly and with enmity.

"I know! Everyone adorns himself with something, but it's only a mask! I see my uncle wants to bargain with God, just as a clerk has to give an account to his master. Your father gave a banner to the church, I draw the conclusion that he has cheated somebody or is going to do so. And everybody is the same, wherever you look. They say: here's a penny for you, but give me back five. Have you read that merchant Migunoff gave three hundred roubles to the hospital and then asked the town council to release him from the arrears that are due on his fabric, and they amount to a thousand. That's the way everyone gammons the other and tries to justify himself in the eyes of his neighbour. And in my opinion, whether you have sinned willingly or involuntarily, you ought to put out your neck for the blow."

"That's true," said Jacob, thoughtfully, "it's true about the hunchback, and it's true about my father. Oh, dear! you and I were not born in the right place. You are malicious; at least, you comfort yourself by judging everybody, and judging them more and more severely. But I can't even do that. Oh! if I could only go away somewhere!" exclaimed Jacob, with distress.

"Where can you go to?" asked Ilia, smiling.

"M-yes."

And they were both silent, sitting despondently opposite each other at the table. And on the table lay the big yellow book in the leather binding with iron clasps.

Someone began bustling about in the entrance-hall, hollow voices were heard, then a hand scraped the door for some time, trying to find the handle. The friends waited in silence. The door opened slowly, gradually, and Perfishka staggered into the cellar. He caught his foot on the threshold, stumbled and fell on his knees, lifting up his right hand, in which he held his harmonica.

"Wo!" said he, and laughed a drunken laugh. After him came Matitsa. She bent over the shoemaker at once, took him under his arms and began lifting him, saying with a faltering tongue,—

"Oh! how tipsy he is—heigho, drunkard!"

"Matchmaker, don't touch me. I'll get up myself—myself."

He began swaying to and fro, then got upon his feet with an effort and went up to his friends, offering them his left hand.

"Good-morning! Our respects to you, and yours to us."

Matitsa burst into a husky, stupid laugh.

"Where have you come from?" asked Ilia.

Meanwhile Jacob looked at the drunkards with a smile, and was silent.

"Where from? From a miracle—ha, ha! B-boys! dears, heigho!" Perfishka began stamping on the floor and singing:—

"Little bones, so young and tender,
When the bones grow big and tall,
I will sell them at a stall."

"Matchmaker! say all in one breath. Or else better let's sing the song that you taught me. W-well—" He leant his back by Matitsa against the stove, and, jogging the woman in the side with his elbow, began feeling for the stops of his harmonica.

"Where's Mashutka?" asked Ilia, sternly.

"Hullo, you!" cried Jacob, jumping up from his chair. "Where is Masha in reality?"

But the drunkards paid no attention to their questions. Matitsa bent her head on one side and began singing:—

"Oh! gossip, gossip, the brandy is good."

And Perfishka waved his harmonica in the air and caught up the song in a high voice:—

"Let's have a drink, gossip, for it's Monday to-day."

Ilia got up, and, taking him by the shoulder, gave him such a shake that Perfishka knocked the back of his head against the stove.

"Where's your daughter?"

"His da-aughter wa-andered about in the middle of the night," muttered Perfishka, senselessly, catching hold of his head with his hand.

Jacob asked Matitsa, but she only said with a smile,—

"And I won't tell you. I won't, and I won't tell you."

"Perhaps they've gone and sold her, the devils!" said Ilia to his friend, smiling grimly. Jacob glanced at him with dismay, and asked the shoemaker in a piteous voice,—

"Perfili, listen! Where is Mashutka?"

"Ma-shut-ka!" drawled Matitsa, with a sneer. "Aha, so you've thought of her at last."

"Ilia! What's this? What shall we do?" asked Jacob, with distress.

"We must let the police know," said Ilia, looking gloomily at the drunkards.

"Matchmaker," cried Perfiska, becoming suddenly radiant, "do you hear? They want to let the police know—ha, ha, ha!"

"The po-oli-ice?" drawled Matitsa, ominously, rolling her great eyes from Ilia to Jacob, and suddenly tossing her arms in an absurd way, roared at the top of her voice, "And wouldn't you like to go to the police yourselves? Don't you want to? G-get out of my hut. This is my hut. We'll get married too."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the shoemaker, holding his sides.

"Let's go away, Jacob," said Ilia. "The devil can't make head or tail of it. Let's go!"

"Wait a bit," said Jacob, quite lost and in dismay. "Is it possible they've married her? Her? Why, is she fit for it? Perfishka, tell us—have you really? Do tell us, where is Masha?"

"Matitsa! my wife, seize them. S-s-s. Bark at them, gnaw at them—ha, ha! Where is Masha?"

Perfishka drew in his lips and tried to whistle, but

could not, and put out his tongue at Jacob instead and burst out laughing again. Matitsa went at Ilia and roared furiously,—

“Who are you?”

Ilia pushed her away and went out of the cellar. In the entrance Jacob caught him up, seized him by the shoulder, and, stopping him in the dark, began saying,—

“Can one do such a thing? Is it allowed? She is a little girl, Ilia. Is it possible they have married her?”

“Well, don’t jabber,” Ilia interrupted him sharply. “It’s useless now. You ought to have kept an eye on them before. You looked for the beginning, while they got to the end in the meantime.”

Jacob was silent, but after a minute began speaking again, as he went through the yard behind Luneff,—

“I’m not to blame. I knew she took day work to tidy up rooms, somewhere.”

“Go to the devil! I don’t care if you are to blame or not,” said Ilia, roughly, stopping in the middle of the yard. “One must flee from this house. One ought to set it on fire, yes!”

“O Lord, Lord!” said Jacob, softly, standing behind Luneff.

Ilia turned round and looked at him. He was standing with his arms hanging helplessly at his sides and his head bent, as if he were waiting for a blow.

“Cry,” said Ilia, mockingly, and went away, leaving his friend all alone in the darkness, in the middle of the yard.

The next morning he heard from Perfishka that they had really married Masha to a shopkeeper, Krenoff, a widower about fifty years of age, who had lost his wife not long ago. Shaking his head, which was aching after his drunken state, Perfishka lay on the stove and related disjointedly,—

“‘And so,’ says he to me, ‘I have,’ says he, ‘two children.’ He has two boys, one is five years old, the other three. ‘Well,’ says he, ‘they need a nurse, and they have a nurse, a stranger woman, who will

begin stealing and so on. So,' says he, 'persuade your daughter.' Well, and I did persuade her, and Matitsa persuaded her. Matitsa is wise, she understood at once. She had no way to turn, it could be worse, but never—better! 'All right,' says she, 'I'll marry him.' Yes, and she married him. All was arranged in three days. Matitsa and I received three roubles each, and we both spent it in drink yesterday. Well, Matitsa does drink, a horse couldn't drink more!"

Ilia listened and was silent. He saw that Masha was provided for better than could have been hoped for. But nevertheless he was sorry for the little girl. The last few days he had scarcely seen her at all, and had not thought of her, and now, without her, the house seemed to have grown suddenly more evil and dirtier.

The shoemaker's yellow and swollen face looked at Ilia from the stove, his hoarse voice creaked like a half-broken twig of a tree in autumn. Luneff looked at Perfishka with a sad feeling at his heart.

"Krenoff made the condition that I should not set my foot in his house. 'You can come now and then,' says he, 'to my shop, I'll give you a glass, but don't hope to get into my house any more than if it was heaven.' Ilia Yakovich! won't you give me five copecks to cure my fit of intoxication? Do give them me, be so kind."

"Wait a bit, I'll give them to you," said Luneff. "Well, and what will you do now?"

The shoemaker spat on the floor, and answered,—

"I'll become a thorough drunkard. While Masha was not provided for, I laid some restraint upon myself—sometimes I worked—I felt an obligation towards her. But now I know that she is fed, has clothes and shoes, and is as safe as if she was locked up in a box. That means I can begin a general intoxication."

"Can't you stop drinking?"

"In no way," answered the shoemaker, shaking his dishevelled head negatively. "And what for?"

"Don't you wish for anything in life?"

"Will you give me five copecks? That's all I want."

"I can't understand it," said Ilia, shrugging his shoulders. "I can't understand how a man can live and not wish for anything in his whole life."

"You're speaking of a man, and I am I," said Perfishka, calmly, in a philosophising way. "When a man desires anything, Fate bestirs itself in his behalf, that's how it is! And if a man is made of straw, and you can't put anything into him, what need has Fate to trouble about him? I'll tell you this: once I wanted to do a stroke of business—at the time when my wife was still living—I wanted to carry off a bit of Grandfather Jeremiah's belongings. I said to myself: if it isn't me, somebody else will rob the old man. But, thank God, others were before me in that affair. I'm not sorry. But then I saw that a man must know how to desire a thing." The shoemaker laughed and began to get down from the stove, saying,—

"Well, give me the five copecks, my inside is burning fit to kill me."

"Here you are, swallow a glass," said Ilia. And looking with a smile at Perfishka, he asked, "Do you know?"

"What?"

"You're a charlatan, you're a good-for-nothing fellow and a miserable drunkard—all that is quite true."

"Quite true," confirmed the shoemaker, standing before Ilia with his five-copeck piece in his hand.

"But sometimes it seems to me," continued Ilia, thoughtfully, in a serious voice, "that I don't know a better man than you—by God!"

Perfishka looked at Ilia's serious but gentle face, smiling incredulously.

"Are you joking, Ilia Yakovlich?"

"You can believe me or not, as you like. I did not say it to praise, but simply for myself, in condemnation of men."

"That's too hard for me! No, I suppose my head was not made to break sugar. I don't understand you. I'll go and have a drink, perhaps I'll get wiser."

"Wait a bit!" Luneff stopped him, catching hold of his shirt. "I want to ask you: are you afraid of God?"

Perfishka transferred the weight of his body from one foot to the other without hurrying, and said half offended,—

"I have nothing to fear God for. I don't hurt anybody, and never did hurt anybody."

"Do you say your prayers?" asked Luneff, lowering his voice.

"Well, I pray, naturally, seldom."

Ilia saw that the shoemaker did not wish to talk, and was yearning for the public-house with all his soul.

"Here, Perfil, are ten copecks more."

"This is a different conversation!" cried the latter, and became radiant with joy.

"But tell me, how do you pray?" Luneff began questioning him again.

"I? I—very simply! I don't know any prayers. 'Virgin Mary,' I knew, but have forgotten it long ago. I believe I know the beggar's prayer—'Lord Jesus,' and so on to the end. Perhaps it will come in handy in my old age. I pray simply—'Lord, be merciful unto me.'"

Perfishka looked at the ceiling, and, nodding his head, added convincingly,—

"He understands. Can I go? I want a drink badly."

"Go, go along," said Ilia, observing Perfishka thoughtfully. "Only one thing more: the day will come and you'll die. Then God will ask you: 'how have you lived, man?'"

"And I will answer: 'Lord, I was born a tiny thing, and I died tipsy, and I don't remember anything.' He'll laugh and forgive me."

The shoemaker smiled happily and went away.

And Luneff remained alone in the cellar. It seemed strange that Masha would never again appear

in this close, dirty pit, and Perfishka would probably also soon be turned away.

An April sun looked into the window, lighting up the unswept floor. Everything in the cellar was in disorder, it was uncomfortable and miserable, as if a dead body had just been carried out.

Sitting straight up in his chair, Ilia looked at the square stove, with the plaster peeling off, and distressing thoughts attacked him one after the other.

"What if I were to go and confess?" entered his head suddenly.

But he instantly pushed the thought angrily from him.

CHAPTER XX

THAT same evening Ilia was obliged to leave Petruha Filimonoff's house for good. It happened thus. When he came back from town, his uncle, very much upset, met him in the yard, led him aside behind a heap of wood, and said,—

"Well, Ilusha, you must go away. Just listen to what's happened."

The hunchback shut his eyes in terror, and, swinging his arms upwards, slapped his sides.

"Yashka got dead tipsy and hit straight into his father's eyes, calling him—'thief!' and other ugly names: 'shameless libertine,' 'pitiless fellow!'—in a word, he lost all control over himself and just roared! And Petruha gave him a blow on the mouth; and then caught hold of him by the hair and began stamping upon him with his feet; he beat him till he was covered with blood! Yashka is lying down now and groaning and crying! Then Petruka pitched into me. 'Drive away Ilia,' says he, 'for it is Ilia,' says he, 'who has set Yashka against me.' And he roared dreadfully! So just take care."

Ilia took the strap off his neck, and, giving his case to his uncle, said,—

"Take hold of it!"

"Wait a bit! Where are you off to? He'll give it you."

Ilia's hands trembled with pity for Jacob and wrath against his father.

"Take it, I say," said he, with set teeth, and went to the eating-house. He clenched his teeth so tightly that his cheek bones and jaws began to ache, and his head suddenly grew dizzy. Through the dizziness he heard his uncle crying out something about the police, and

ruin, and prison, but went on, feeling as if he were going downhill.

In the eating-house behind the bar stood Petruha, talking and smiling with some ragamuffin. The light of the lamp fell on the bald place on his head, and his face seemed to shine with a contented smile.

"Ah, merchant!" cried he, mockingly, seeing Ilia, and his brows twitched angrily, "it's you whom I want."

He was standing in the door which led to his rooms, screening it with his body.

Ilia, firm and stern, came up close to him and said loudly,—

"Move aside!"

"W-what?" drawled Petruha.

"Let me pass to Jacob."

"I'll give you a Jacob."

But here Ilia, quite unexpectedly even to himself, silently swung out his arm and gave Petruha a blow on the cheek with all his might. The waiters came running from all sides, and someone cried out,—

"Hold him! Beat him!"

There was a commotion among all the people present, as if boiling water had been poured on to them, but Ilia sprang across Petruha, passed through the door and drew the bolt after him.

In the little room, crammed with cases of wine and boxes, an iron lamp burnt fitfully. The glass was black with smoke. In the half light and confusion Ilia could not find his friend all at once. Jacob was lying on the floor, his head was in shadow and his face seemed to be black and terrible. Ilia took the lamp in his hand and sat down on his heels, letting the light fall on the beaten man. Bruises and scratches covered Jacob's face like a hideous dark mask, his eyes were swollen, he was breathing heavily, and, apparently, could not see, for he asked, with a groan,—

"Who's there?"

"I," said Luneff in a low voice, getting up.

"Give me something to drink."

Ilia looked round. They were forcing the door, and someone was crying out,—

"Go round to the back entrance."

"The police. Run for the police-sergeant."

Petruha's shrill voice, like a howl, rose above the din.

"Everybody saw. I did not touch him, a-a-a."

Ilia laughed viciously. He was glad Petruha was hurt, and going up to the door, he calmly began to confer with those who were laying siege to it.

"Hullo, you! Stop roaring. If I pitched into his snout once, he won't die of it, and I shall be brought before the magistrate. So you need not meddle with what does not concern you. Don't press against the door so, I'll open it in a minute."

He opened the door and stood in it, as if in a frame, clenching his fists hard and ready for anything. The people stepped back, awed by his tall, strong figure and the readiness to fight which was clearly painted on his face. But Petruha began pushing everyone aside, howling out,—

"Aha! you rascal! I'll give—"

"Lead him away and just look in here, if you please!" said Ilia to the people, stepping aside. "Just see how he has mutilated this man."

Several of the guests, scowling at Ilia, entered the room and bent over Jacob. One of them in terror and amazement said,—

"Well, he has ironed him out!"

"That's called polishing up with a will!" added a second.

"Bring some water and call the police!" said Ilia.

The public was on his side; he saw and felt that, and spoke in a loud, sharp voice,—

"You all know Petruha Filimonoff, you all know he's the biggest villain in the whole street. But who can say a word against his son? Well, here is the son: he is lying crippled, perhaps for life, and his father won't get anything for it. I gave Petruha only one blow and I shall be punished. Is that right? Will that be just? It's always the same. One person has full liberty to do what he likes, and another mustn't even twitch his brow"

Some of the people sighed feelingly, while the rest were silent. Ilia wanted to say something more, but Petruha burst into the room, and, crying out in a shrill voice, began driving everyone out of it.

"Go away, go away! This is my business, he is my son! I'm his father! Go! I'm not afraid of the police. And I don't need any trial. I don't need it. I shall make you smart, my fine fellow, without any trial. Be off!"

Ilia was giving Jacob some water, kneeling beside him, and, with a great pity in his heart, looked at his friend's bleeding, swollen lips and his mutilated face. Jacob swallowed the water and spoke in a whisper,—

"He has knocked all my teeth out—it's painful to breathe—take me away, Ilusha, dear! Take me away!"

Tears trickled over the swellings round his eyes.

"He must be taken to the hospital," said Ilia, sternly, turning to Petruha.

The barman looked at his son and muttered something hastily and indistinctly. One of his eyes was wide open, while the other was almost quite closed by a swelling, caused by Ilia's blow, like Jacob's.

"Do you hear?" cried Ilia.

"Don't roar!" said Petruha, quietly and peaceably all of a sudden. "He can't be taken to a hospital, everyone will know. You've made a mess of it as it is. I'm member of the town council. It won't do for me."

"You scoundrel!" said Ilia, and spat scornfully on Filimonoff's feet. "I tell you—send him to the hospital! If you don't, I'll make a still greater scandal."

"Well, well, well! Don't be angry—I expect he's shamming."

Ilia jumped to his feet; but Filimonoff sprang towards the door and cried,—

"Ivan! call an isvoschik—fifteen copecks to the hospital. Jacob, dress! You needn't sham, it was not a stranger who beat you, but your own father. Yes, I was pounded in my time a bit worse than that—oho! how I was pounded!"

"Thank you," gasped Jacob to Ilia, almost inaudibly

and the tears kept trickling over the swellings and down his swollen and bloody cheeks.

Behind the bar stood Terence, and his polite, timid voice kept sounding in Ilia's ears,—

"Do you wish a three copecks' or five copecks' worth? Here you are—for five. Some caviare? The caviare is all out. Take some herring."

When Luneff had taken Jacob to the hospital, he saw the impossibility of returning to Filimonoff's house and went to Olimpiada for the night. He felt as if he were filled with cold mire and a sharp pain seemed to eat into his heart and weaken it. He was oppressed by a feeling of great wretchedness, his thoughts were confused, he walked along tired out, and only one thing was clear to him: that it was impossible to live like this. His dream of a small shop and of a clean, lonely life flashed up again with renewed force.

The next day he found himself a lodging—a small room next to the kitchen. It was let by a young lady in a red blouse; she had a pink face with a sharp little bird-like nose and a tiny mouth; dark curls waved prettily above her narrow forehead, and she was always pushing them up with a quick movement of her little thin hand.

"Five roubles for such a nice room is not dear," she said briskly, and smiled, seeing that her dark lively eyes were disconcerting the broad-shouldered young man. Ilia looked at the walls of his future abode and wondered who this young lady could be.

"You see—the wall-paper is quite new—the window opens into the garden—what more can you wish for? In the morning I will make the samovar boil—and you can carry it into your room yourself."

"Are you the housemaid?" asked Ilia, full of curiosity.

The young lady stopped smiling, knitted her brows, drew herself up, and said with importance,—

"I am not the housemaid, but the landlady of these lodgings, and my husband—"

"But are you married?" exclaimed Ilia in astonishment, and glanced at his landlady's spare, well-shaped

figure incredulously. This time she did not get angry, but laughed loudly and merrily.

"How funny you are! First you call me a house maid and then you do not believe that I am married."

"But how can I believe it, if you look quite like a girl?" said Luneff, smiling too.

"I tell you, I have been married three years and my husband is commissary of police."

Ilia looked into her face and laughed softly—why, he hardly knew.

"What a queer fellow!" exclaimed the woman, shrugging her shoulders and observing him with curiosity. "Well, do you take the room?"

"Yes, that's done with! Do you desire me to give you any money down?"

"Of course! Give me a rouble at least."

"I'll move in in about two or three hours."

"Very well. I'm glad to have such a lodger—you seem to be merry."

"Not very," said Luneff, smiling.

He went into the street still smiling with a feeling of pleasure. He liked the room with its light blue wall-paper, and the small, brisk woman; but somehow he was especially pleased to live in the house of a commissary of police. He saw something comical and provoking, and, perhaps, even dangerous for him in it. He wanted to see Jacob, he hailed an *isvoschik* to take him to the hospital, got into the *drosky*, and, laughing inwardly, began wondering what he was to do with the money, and where he could hide it.

When Luneff arrived at the hospital, he was told that Jacob had just had a bath and was now sound asleep. Ilia stopped in the corridor, near the window, not knowing what to do: whether to go away, or wait till his friend was awake? Invalids, in yellow dressing-gowns, walked past him, one after the other, tapping softly with their slippers and glancing at him with dull eyes. They were talking to each other quietly and the hum of their low voices mingled with distant groans. The echo, magnifying every sound, carried them down the long corridor. I seemed as if some sad and invisible

person were flying slowly about in the stuffy air of the hospital and sighing piteously. Ilia felt a desire to get away from these yellow walls; but suddenly one of the invalids stepped up to him, and, putting out his hand, said quietly,—

“Good-morning!”

Luneff lifted his eyes and stepped backwards in astonishment.

“Paul! Lord Jesus! You here too?”

“And who else?” asked Paul, quickly.

His face was grey and he blinked his eyes in an agitated and troubled way.

“Jacob—his father has beaten him. How came you here? Have you been here a long time?”

And with pity in his voice he went on,—

“Eh! brother! How changed you are!”

Paul sighed, his lips quivered and his eyes grew dim. He bent his head as if he were guilty, and repeated in a hoarse voice,—

“Changed—yes!”

“What’s the matter with you?” asked Luneff, with interest, in a troubled voice.

“Well—what? As if you don’t know?”

Paul glanced at Ilia’s face and bent his head again.

“Have you caught the infection?” asked Luneff in a whisper.

“Well, of course.”

“Is it possible you caught it from Vera?”

“And from whom else?” answered Paul, gloomily.

Ilia shook his head, and, after a silence, said viciously, with conviction,—

“I’ll catch it too, one of these days. For sure.”

Paul laughed painfully, stepped up to Ilia, and, looking confidently into his eyes, said,—

“I thought you’d scorn me now. I was wandering about and suddenly saw you—I felt ashamed, turned away and went past.”

“How clever!” said Luneff, reproachfully.

“How was I to know how you would look at it? One must own—it’s a vile illness. Eh, brother? I’ve been here two weeks. It’s so dull, such a torment!

Walking and lying one is always thinking of the same. Especially at night—it seems as if you were being broiled on hot coals. The time seems as long as a hair in your mouth. And you feel as if you were being sucked down into a bog, and you're all alone and there is nobody to call for help."

Paul spoke almost in a whisper, and his whole face quivered, while his hands crumpled the collar of his dressing-gown convulsively. Shaking his head, he said in a half whisper,—

"If Fate does not fancy a fellow and begins to make sport of him—it's like the blows of a hammer on your heart."

"And where is Vera?" asked Ilia, thoughtfully.

"The devil only knows," said Gratchoff, with a bitter smile.

"Doesn't she come to see you?"

"She came once. I drove her away. I can't bear to see her, the infamous wretch!" whispered Paul, savagely.

Ilia looked at his distorted face reproachfully and said,—

"Well, it's nonsense what you are saying. If you want justice done you, you must be just yourself. In what is she to blame? Just think."

"And whom else can I blame?" exclaimed Paul, hotly, in a low voice. "Whom? tell me. The whole night long I ask myself: why is my life spoilt? Because I loved Vera?—yes. She was all to me—mother, sister, wife, friend, my love couldn't be expressed even if it were written in the sky with stars, let alone in words!"

Paul's eyes had grown red and two big tears rolled heavily down. He wiped them away with the sleeve of his dressing-gown and continued more quietly,—

"She was like a stone that lay in my path, and I stumbled over her."

"What you say is unjust," said Luneff, feeling more sorry for Vera than for Paul. "Where is your path? You have no path, these are all empty words. You drank the mead and praised it; 'it's strong,' you said; then you had too much and put the blame on it; 'it

makes me tipsy,' say you. And how is it for her? She caught it from somebody else too!"

"And she too, and she too!" said Paul, and then asked in a broken voice,—

"Do you think I am not sorry for her?"

"Aha! That's better."

"I feel a spite against her, against whom else can I have anything? I drove her away. And when she went, and began to cry, she cried so softly and bitterly—my heart bled for her. I could have cried myself, but I felt as if my heart were full of bricks instead of tears. And I began to meditate over it all. Heigho, Ilia! There is no proper life for us."

"No!" said Luneff, slowly, and smiling strangely. "It is all beyond me. It seems as if some power is crushing everybody. Jacob can't live in peace because of his father, Masha is thrust into marriage with an old devil, you here."

He suddenly began to laugh softly, and said, lowering his voice,—

"I'm the only one of you all who is in luck! Really I have only to think of a thing—and it's done!"

"Is it possible?" asked Paul, incredulously and curiously.

"Take my word for it! Fortune is on my side. It beckons me on further and further."

"You are speaking in a nasty way," said Paul, looking at him furtively. "Are you jeering at yourself?"

"No, someone else is, though!" said Ilia, knitting his brows gloomily. "He's jeering at us all. Do you know I could tell you a lot? I look into life and see—there is no justice."

"I see the same!" exclaimed Paul, quietly, but with his whole soul. "Here, let's go into that corner, over there."

And they went down the corridor side by side, looking into each other's eyes. Red spots burnt on Paul's cheeks and his eyes were sparkling with vivacity and daring, as they used to before he got ill.

"And I see that the likes of us are robbed of everything," he was saying in Ilia's ear. "Whatever we reach for is denied us."

"That's it!"

"Nothing is for us! I'll take an example: I love a girl. She's like a wife to me though we are not married. I need the whole of her! Every man needs the whole of a woman! But I can't have her for myself all alone! and she the same. The whole of me is necessary to her too. How's that? Ah! I'm poor? All right! But do I work or not? I have worked hard my whole life long, since I was ten years old! Let me live in return."

"While Petruha Filimonoff lives easily without working at all and can have everything he desires and do everything he likes—why?" completing his friend's idea, said Ilia, showing his teeth spitefully.

"The doctor shouts at me as if I were a convict: what have I done?" continued Gratchoff. "He is learned, he ought to behave honourably towards everyone. Am I a human being or not? That's the question. I drove Vera away, but I'm no fool, I know she is not to blame."

"It is not the stick that beats, but the one who holds it."

They had stopped in a semi-dark corner of the corridor, near a window, the panes of which were painted yellow, and, pressing close against the wall, they began speaking hotly, catching each other's thoughts in mid-air. From a distance a protracted groan reached them. The monotonous sound of the groan was like the sound of a deep chord, which is being touched at regular intervals, and vibrates languidly, giving forth a hopeless sound, as if it knew that there was no warm heart capable of understanding and soothing its painful vibrations and wailings. Paul was burning with the consciousness of the injury that had been dealt out to him by life's heavy hand; he vibrated, too, like a chord, from excitement, and whispered to his friend hastily and disconnectedly all his complaints and conjectures; and Ilia felt as if Paul's words were striking sparks out of his heart, and had set fire to the dark and contradictory element that existed in his breast and was constantly distressing him, and it was now on fire and ready to disappear. He felt that in place of his painful and angry

perplexity about life, something else had blazed up which was going to light up the darkness of his soul, relieve it and quiet it for ever.

"Why are you sinless if you have enough to eat; and if you're educated you're always in the right?" whispered Paul, standing in front of Ilia, heart to heart. And he looked round, as if he felt the proximity of the unknown enemy who had spoiled his life. "Well, let us say—I am hungry and I'm ignorant; but I have a soul, haven't I? Or, perhaps, a hungry person has no soul? I see there is no real life for me—my life is clipped, all my desires are cut off and walls stand up on all sides. Why?"

"No one can answer that!" exclaimed Ilia, sternly. "And there is no one to ask. Who will understand us? We are strangers to everyone."

"Yes. It's true. Whom have we to talk to?"

And waving his hand, Paul was silent. Luneff looked thoughtfully along the corridor and sighed heavily. When they were silent, the groan was heard more distinctly. Big and strong must have been the chest from which that groan issued, and great must have been its pain.

"Is Olimpiada still with you?" asked Paul of Luneff.

"Yes. I still live with her," answered Ilia.

"Do you know," continued he, smiling strangely and lowering his voice, "Jacob has read till he has begun to doubt the existence of God?"

Paul glanced at him and asked vaguely,—

"Is it possible?"

"Yes. He's found such a book. What is your opinion about it?"

"I, you see," said Paul quietly and thoughtfully, "I somehow have not thought about it. I don't go to church."

"But I—do think. I think a great deal. And I can't understand how God stands it."

And again they entered into a disjointed and hurried conversation. They were so engrossed that they talked until the servitor came up and asked Luneff severely,—

"Why are you hiding here, eh?"

"I'm not hiding," said Ilia.

"Don't you see that all the visitors have gone?"

"No, I did not see. Good-bye, Paul. Go and see Jacob."

"Well, well. Be off!" cried the servitor.

"Come again soon, for the love of Christ!" said Gratchoff.

"I have told you to go," persisted the servitor. Then he followed Ilia, grumbling,—

"Ragged vagabonds, hiding in corners."

Luneff went slower, and when the servitor caught him up, he said coolly and savagely,—

"Don't growl, you wretched soldier, or else I'll say to you, 'Quiet, dog!'"

The servitor stopped suddenly, and Luneff went forward quickly, experiencing a keen pleasure from the consciousness of having snubbed a fellow-being.

In the street he began thinking over the fate of his friends. Paul had vagabondised, been in prison and done all sorts of hard work from childhood. What cold and hunger and blows had he endured? And now—he had got into a hospital. Masha would scarcely ever know what a happy life was like. And Jacob too. How could Jacob stand up for himself?

Luneff saw that of all four his life was the best; but this knowledge did not arouse any feeling of pleasure in him. He only smiled and looked round suspiciously.

CHAPTER XXI

IN his new lodgings he began an easy life and was greatly interested in the landlord and his wife. The landlady was called Tatiana Vlacieвна. She was as merry as a bird, and liked to talk; she told Luneff in detail the whole story of her life a few days after he had settled down in the blue room.

In the morning, while Ilia drank his tea in his room, she flitted about the kitchen with an apron on and her sleeves pushed up to her elbows; peeping merrily in at his door, she spoke with animation.

"My husband and I are not rich, but we are educated and belong to a cultured class. I went to a preparatory gymnasium and he was in a military school, though he did not finish the course. But we want to be rich and shall be. We have no children and they are the greatest expense. I cook myself, go to market myself, while for the dirty work I hire a girl for a rouble and a half a month, on the condition that she lives at home. Do you know how much I save in this way?" She stopped in the door, and, shaking her curls, counted out on her fingers.

"A cook gets three roubles in wages, and then she must be fed—seven—ten! She is sure to steal three roubles a month—thirteen! Her room I let to you—eighteen! That is how much a cook costs! Then I buy everything in large quantities: butter—twenty pounds at a time, flour—a whole sack, sugar—a whole loaf, and so on. On all this I gain about twelve or thirteen roubles! If I served anywhere in the police or telegraph-office—I would be working to keep my cook, while now I do not cost my husband anything and am proud of it! That is the way one ought to live, young man! Learn from me." She looked into Ilia's face slyly

with her lively eyes, and he smiled at her in a disconcerted way. He liked her and she aroused in him a feeling of respect. When he woke up in the morning, she was already bustling about the kitchen together with the silent half-grown and pock-marked girl, who looked at her and everything else around her with colourless eyes. In the evening, when he came home, she opened the door to him with a smile and was always clean and tidy and scented with something fragrant. If her husband was at home, he played on the guitar and she sang in a ringing voice, or else they sat down and played at cards, "fools," for kisses. Ilia could hear everything from his room, the prattle of the strings, sometimes merry and sometimes pathetic, the sound of the cards and kisses. Their lodgings consisted of two rooms—of their bedroom and of another next to Ilia's, which served as a dining-room and parlour, and in it they passed the evening. Every morning this room was filled with the ringing sound of birds' voices—a tomtit chirped away, a greenfinch and a goldfinch sang at the top of their voice, outbidding each other, as if they were competing; a bullfinch squeaked and muttered in an important senile manner, and sometimes the soft, pensive song of a linnet mingled with the louder sounds.

Tatiana Vlacieвна's husband, Kirik Nikodimich Avtonomoff, was a man of about twenty-six years of age; he was stout and tall, with a big nose and black teeth. His good-natured face was covered with pimples and his colourless eyes wore an expression of imperturbable repose. His light hair, cut short, stood on end like a brush, and his somewhat heavy figure had an awkward and comical air. He walked with a heavy tread, and the very first time he saw Ilia, he asked,—

"Do you like singing birds?"

"Yes."

"Do you catch them?"

"No," answered Ilia, looking with surprise at the commissary of police. The latter wrinkled up his nose, pondered for a minute, and asked again,—

"Have you never caught them?"

"No."

"Never?"

"Never."

At this Kirik Avtonomoff smiled condescendingly and said,—

"That means you do not love birds, if you never catch them. But I love them and catch them and was even expelled from the military school for that. And I would catch them now too, but I do not wish to lower myself in the eyes of my superiors. For, although the love for singing birds is a noble passion, still, catching them is an amusement unworthy of a sedate person. If I were in your place, I should certainly catch goldfinches. They are jolly little birds. 'God's little bird' is expressly said of the goldfinch."

Avtonomoff spoke, looking into Ilia's face in a dreamy way, while Ilia listened to him and felt uncomfortable. It seemed to him that the commissary of police was speaking of bird-catching figuratively and was hinting at something else. Ilia's heart contracted, and he pricked up his ears. But Avtonomoff's colourless eyes calmed him; he decided suddenly that the commissary was not in the least cunning, but quite a simpleton. He smiled politely and was silent in answer to Kirik's words. The latter was, apparently, gratified by his lodger's modest silence and serious face, for he smiled and began speaking again,—

"Come some evening and have tea with us. We are simple folk, come without any ceremony, we will have a game of cards—'fools.' We very rarely see anybody. It is very agreeable to receive company, but one must treat one's guests to something and that is disagreeable, for it costs money."

The more Ilia saw of his landlord's happy life, the more he liked them. Everything was clean and sound, everything was done quietly and peacefully, and they both, apparently, loved each other. The brisk little woman resembled a merry tomtit, and her husband an awkward bullfinch, and their lodgings were as snug as a nest. Sitting in his room of an evening, Luneff listened to them talking, and thought,—

"This is how one ought to live."

And sighing enviously, he hoped for the time when he would be able to open his shop and have a small, clean room; he would keep birds and live all alone, quietly, smoothly and peacefully, as if he were in a slumber. Behind the wall Tatiana Vlacieva was telling her husband what she had bought, how much she had spent and how much she had spared, while her husband laughed with a gurgling sound and praised her.

"Oh! you clever girl! My dearest little birdy. Here, let me kiss you."

Then he would begin telling his wife about all the events in the town, of the official reports he had drawn, what the policeman or some other chief had said to him. They spoke of the possibility of a promotion shortly, and discussed the question of its being necessary in that case to change their lodgings. Ilia would lie and listen to them until suddenly he would be seized with a curious feeling of distress. He would feel suffocated and oppressed in his blue room, looked round anxiously, as if he were trying to find the cause of his distress, and, feeling that he could not bear this heaviness in his heart any longer, would go to Olimpiada or walk about the streets for a long time.

Olimpiada became more and more exacting and jealous, and he quarrelled with her constantly. She had grown pale, her eyes were sunken and dark, her arms had grown thinner—and Ilia did not like it; but he was still more displeased by the fact that she had lately begun to speak of conscience, of God, and her desire to enter a monastery. He did not believe in the sincerity of her words, for he knew she could not exist without men, that she could not vanquish her indomitable thirst for a man's caresses.

"Don't pray for me in case of anything," said he one day, smiling sarcastically. "I'll see to my sins myself."

She looked at him with fear and sadness.

"Take care, Ilia, one ought not to joke thus."

"And I'm of the same opinion."

"You don't believe me? Wait a bit—you'll believe."

"No, why? I believe—some people are capable of entering a monastery out of spite. And they do it too."

Olimpiada got angry with him and they came to strong words.

"You wretched proud creature!" cried the woman, with flashing eyes. "Wait a bit! you can draw yourself up in your pride as much as you like—but you'll have to bend in the end. And you'll bend down to the earth! And what are you so proud of? Your beauty or your youth? All will pass, all. And then you'll crawl on the ground like a snake and try to obtain a caress, and you'll beg for it: have pity on me, you'll say. But nobody will pity you."

She reproached him, and her eyes grew so bloodshot that it seemed as if blood would start out of them instead of tears. When they quarrelled she never alluded to the murder of Poluektoff, but in her good moments she kept persuading Ilia to forget about it. Luneff wondered at her forbearance, and one day, after a quarrel, asked her,—

"Lipa! why don't you ever say a word about the old man when you're in a rage?"

She answered without hesitating,—

"Because it is not my business nor yours either. If you are not found out, it means he only got his deserts; in which case you were the hand, but not the power. There was no necessity for you to strangle him—you say so yourself. Consequently, you were only the means of his punishment."

Ilia laughed incredulously.

"What's the matter?" asked the woman.

"Nothing. I was only thinking that if a man isn't a fool, he must be a rascal—ha, ha, ha! He can justify anything—if only it is necessary to him. And he can condemn anything."

"I can't understand you," said Olimpiada, shaking her head.

"What can't you understand?" asked Ilia, sighing and shrugging his shoulders. "It's simple; I mean this: put before me something in life that will always

remain the same; find me something that the very cleverest man, with all his cunning, could not justify nor condemn—that would stand firm. Find me such a thing! You can't. There's no such object in the whole world. Everything is many-coloured. And the human soul is many-coloured too—yes!"

"I don't understand," said the woman, after a silence.

"But I understand that in this lies the knot—and this is what crushes us."

One day after a quarrel with Olimpiada, Ilia, who had not been to see her for four days, received a letter from her. She wrote:—

"Well, good-bye, dear Ilusha, for ever; we shall never meet again. Don't try to find me—you won't be able to. By the first steamer which starts I shall leave this cursed town, in which I have broken my heart, for ever. I shall go away never to return—so don't imagine it and don't wait. For all the good in you—I thank you with all my heart, and the bad—I shall not remember. Another thing I must tell you in all truthfulness; I am not going just anywhere, but, simply, I have become intimate with young Ananine, who has been pressing me hard for a long time, and said that I would be the author of his ruin if I did not consent to live with him. And so I consented; it's all the same. We will go to the seashore, to a village where Ananine has a fishing station. He is very simple and even offered to marry me, the fool! Good-bye! It seems to me as if I had seen you in a dream, and I woke up—and there was nothing. Forgive me too. If you knew how my heart aches! Kisses to you, my only one. Don't worry yourself: we are all miserable. Your Lipa has become subdued now, and feels as if she were putting her neck under the butt-end of a gun, so greatly does her bleeding heart ache.

"OLIMPIADA SHLIKOFF.

"I have sent you a parcel by post—a ring as a keepsake. Please wear it.—OL. SH."

Ilia read the letter and bit his lips till they hurt.

Then he read it a second time. Each time the letter pleased him more—it was bitter but flattering to read the simple words, written in large, uneven letters. Ilia had never thought before of the seriousness of this woman's love, but now it seemed to him that she loved him deeply and strongly, and, reading her letter over, again he experienced a feeling of pride and pleasure. But this feeling of pleasure was gradually replaced by the consciousness of the loss of a dear friend, and Ilia began wondering sadly: where and to whom would he now go when he felt dull. The woman seemed to stand before him, he remembered her frantic caresses and her witty discourses and jokes, and a feeling of acute regret grew deep within him. Standing in front of the window with knitted brows, he looked into the garden, where the elder bushes rustled softly in the twilight and the branches of a birch tree, thin as strings, rocked in the air. Behind the wall the strings of a guitar rang sadly and Tatiana Vlacieva sang in a high voice:—

“Let him who wishes, search
For precious amber.”

Ilia held the letter in his hand and thought,—

“She told me she had a will of her own, and that I had given her happiness—but yet—she has gone. Apparently the happiness was not so great.” He felt guilty before Olimpiada, and sadness and pity pressed heavily on his breast and choked him.

“But get me just my ring
From the bottom of the seas,”

sounded behind the wall. Then the commissary of police laughed in a husky voice and the singer rushed into the kitchen, laughing loudly too. In the kitchen she stopped all at once; Ilia felt her presence somewhere near him, but did not want to turn round and look at her, although he knew that his door was open. He was listening to his thoughts and stood motionless, feeling a loneliness enveloping him. The

trees outside the window kept on rocking to and fro, and Luneff felt as if he were torn from the earth and floating away in the cold twilight.

"Ilia Yakovlich! Will you have tea?" called out his landlady.

"No."

Outside the window the mighty peal of the church bell sounded; the deep sound reached the window-panes softly but strongly, and they shook almost imperceptibly. Ilia crossed himself, remembered that he had not been to church for a long time, and was glad of the excuse to leave the house.

"I shall go to evening service," said he, turning to the door. The landlady was standing in the door, holding on to the posts with her hands, and was looking at him with undisguised curiosity. Ilia felt disconcerted by her fixed gaze, and said, as if he were excusing himself,—

"I have not been to church for a long time."

"Ah! all right! I'll get the samovar ready for nine o'clock."

On his way to the church Luneff thought of young Ananine. He knew him: he was a rich merchant, the junior partner of the fishing firm, "Ananine & Brothers"; he was a fair, slight young man with a pale face and blue eyes. He had appeared in the town a short time before and had led a dissipated life from the first.

"That's how men live, like hawks," thought Ilia, bitterly. "He has only just got his feathers—and clutches a dove at once."

He entered the church angry and put out by his thoughts and went into a dark corner, where a ladder, used for lighting the church chandelier, stood.

"Lord, have mercy on us," was being sung in the left choir. A boy who did not know how to harmonise his voice with the hoarse, hollow voice of the chanter was singing in a disagreeable shout, which went through Ilia's head like a gimlet.

The bad singing made him still angrier and he felt a desire to box the boy's ears. It was hot in his corner

from the heated stove and there was a smell of burnt rag. An old woman in a cloak came up to Ilia, looked into his face, and said in a snappish way,—

“You are not in your right place, young gentleman.”

Ilia looked at the collar of her rich cloak, trimmed with martin tails, and silently moved to one side, saying to himself,—

“Merchants seem to have a special place in church too.”

It was the first time he had entered a church since the murder of Poluektoff, and, remembering this, he shuddered. Thinking of his sin, he forgot all else; he felt no terror, but was only sad and wretched.

“Lord, be merciful unto me,” he whispered, crossing himself. The choir responded loudly and harmoniously. The voices of the treble articulated the words of the psalm distinctly and floated round the dome with clear, sweet sounds as of little bells; the tenors quivered like a sonorous, spread chord, and on this background of deep, rich sound, which flowed forth like a stream, the treble voices quivered like the reflection of the sun in a clear brook. The deep notes of the bass resounded solemnly in the air, upholding the children’s singing; at times the beautiful and loud note of a tenor rose above them all, and then the children’s voices shone out again brightly, rising up to the twilight of the dome, where the Almighty looked down in His white robes, pensive and sad, with His hands outstretched majestically over all the people assembled in prayer. The waves of sound and clouds of incense rose up to Him and surrounded Him, while He seemed to move easily amidst it all, ascending into the heights. Suddenly the voices of the choir melted together into one bright mass of sound, which resembled a cloud at sunset, when it is pink and ruby-coloured and purple, and glowing in the rays of the sun with all the magnificence of its colours, melts with the bliss of its own beauty.

When the singing had died away, Ilia heaved a deep sigh of relief. He was happy: he did not feel any fear, nor repentance, nor the irritation that he experienced when he entered the church, and somehow his thoughts

would not dwell on his sin. The singing seemed to have lightened his soul of its burden and purified it. Feeling so unexpectedly happy, he was sorely perplexed, and did not believe in his feeling, but tried to find a sentiment of repentance in it and could not.

What if his landlady were to enter his room out of curiosity, begin rummaging about and find the money?

Ilia tore himself away from his place, left the church, and, hailing an *isvoschik*, drove home. All the way home this thought kept growing, working him up to a state of frenzy.

"If she finds it—well, what does it matter? They won't inform against me, but simply steal it themselves."

But the thought that they would not inform against him, but just steal the money, excited him still more. He felt that if this were to happen, he would go instantly to the police-office, in this same *isvoschik*, and confess that he had killed Poluektoff. No, he did not want to be harassed any more and live in dirt and trouble, while others lived at peace, snugly and in cleanliness, on the money that he had paid for by such a great sin. This thought aroused a cold frenzy in him. Driving up to the house, he pulled the bell violently, and, setting his teeth and clenching his fists, waited for the door to be opened. The door was opened by Tatiana Vlacieva.

"Oh! how loud you did ring! What's the matter with you?" cried she, with fear, glancing at him.

He pushed her aside in silence and went into his room, but at the first glance round saw that all his fears were in vain. The money was hidden behind the top casing of the window and he had stuck a small bit of down to the casing lightly, so that, if anyone had touched the money, the bit of down must have come off. But he could see distinctly on the brown casing a small white spot.

"Are you ill?" asked the landlady, anxiously, appearing in the door.

"Yes, I don't feel well. You must excuse me, I pushed you."

"That is nothing. Stop—how much do you owe the *isvoschik*?"

"Oh, anything. Please have the goodness to pay him."

She ran away, and Ilia jumped instantly on to a chair, seized the money from behind the casing, saw by the touch of it that it was all there, and, thrusting it into his pocket, heaved a sigh of relief. He felt ashamed of his alarm. The bit of down seemed silly and funny to him, like all the rest of it.

"A diabolical suggestion," he said to himself, laughing inwardly. Tatiana Vlacieвна appeared in the door.

"I gave the *isvoschik* twenty copecks," she said hurriedly. "What happened to you—a faintness?"

"Yes—you know—I was standing in the church, suddenly this—"

"Lie down," said the woman, coming into the room. "Lie down, do not mind me. And I will stay with you a little. I am alone—my husband is on duty at the club."

Ilia sat down on his bed and she on a chair, the only one in the whole room.

"I have given you trouble," said Ilia, smiling confusedly.

"That is nothing," answered Tatiana Vlacieвна, observing his face without any ceremony. They were silent. Ilia did not know what to say to this woman, while she continued looking at him and began to smile in a strange way.

"What is it?" asked Ilia, lowering his eyes.

"Shall I say?" asked she, slyly.

"Do."

"You do not know how to sham—there!"

Ilia started and looked at the woman anxiously.

"Yes, you do not know how to. What kind of sick person do you make? You are not ill at all, but simply you received an unpleasant letter. I saw, I saw."

"Yes, I got a letter," said Ilia in a low voice, cautiously.

Outside the window sounded the rustling of the branches. The woman looked sharply through the

window-panes and turned her face again towards Ilia.

"That is—the wind or a bird. My dear lodger, would you like to listen to me? Although I am a young woman, I am not silly."

"Please have the goodness," said Ilia, looking at her curiously.

"Listen," began the landlady, impressively. "Tear that letter to pieces and throw it away. If she has refused you, she has acted like a good little girl, yes. You are too young to marry, you have not enough to keep a wife, and impecunious people should not marry. You are a strong youth, you can work hard and you are handsome—you will always be loved. But for the present beware of falling in love. Work, sell, put money aside, endeavour to obtain enough to enlarge your business, try to open a shop, and then when you have something substantial, marry. You will succeed: you do not drink, you are unassuming and alone in the world."

Ilia listened to her with bent head and smiled inwardly. He wanted to laugh aloud merrily.

"It is no good hanging your head," continued Tatiana Vlacieva in the tone of an experienced person. "It will pass! Love is a malady easily cured. Before my marriage I fell in love three times so deeply that I was ready to drown myself, and nevertheless it passed! But when I saw that it was time for me to marry in good earnest—I married without any love at all."

Ilia lifted his head quickly and looked at the woman.

"What is the matter? Afterwards I got to love my husband. A woman can sometimes fall in love with her husband too."

"What do you mean?" asked Ilia, opening his eyes wide.

Tatiana Vlacieva laughed merrily.

"I was joking. But I will say in earnest: one can marry without love and begin to love afterwards."

And she chattered away with sparkling eyes. Ilia listened attentively, with great interest, looking at her

small, well-shaped figure with respect and wonder. She seemed such a little thing and yet so sound, and true, and clever.

"One would never be at a loss with such a wife," thought he.

It was pleasant to think that an educated woman, a lawful wife and not a kept mistress, clean and slight, a real lady, was sitting with him without giving herself any airs, and even spoke to him, a common man, saying you and not "thou." This thought aroused a feeling of gratitude towards his landlady, and when she rose to go he jumped to his feet, bowed to her, and said,—

"Many thanks to you for not disdaining to comfort me with your conversation."

"Have I comforted you? You see!" She laughed softly and two red spots appeared on her cheeks and her eyes looked steadfastly into Ilia's face for several seconds. "Well, good-bye for the present!" said she in a strange way, and went off with the light step of a girl.

Each day Ilia liked the Avtonomoffs better, and an envy for their peaceful life continued growing in his heart. He did not like the police in general, for he had received much evil at their hands, but Kirik seemed to him a simple working man, kind and of limited capacities. He was the body, while his wife was the soul; he was rarely at home and his presence was of little significance. Tatiana Vlacieвна's attitude towards Ilia grew gradually simpler. She began asking favours of him: to chop wood, bring water, empty the slops, and he did all she asked with pleasure, and, imperceptibly, these small services became a duty. Then the landlady sent the pock-marked girl away, bidding her come only on Saturdays.

CHAPTER XXII

SOMETIMES the Avtonomoffs received company—the assistant of the commissary of police, Korsakoff, a lean man with a long moustache. He wore dark spectacles, smoked thick cigarettes, could not bear isvoschiks, and always spoke of them irritably.

“Nothing spoils the beauty of the town and causes so much disorder as the isvoschiks,” he would say. “They are such brazen-faced brutes! One can always inspire a pedestrian with respect for order in the street, the police-master need only have the following rule printed: ‘All going down the street must keep on the right side, and all going up the street on the left side,’ and instantly the traffic in the street is under discipline. But there is no bringing an isvoschik to reason by any rules; an isvoschik is—the devil only knows what an isvoschik is!”

He would talk of isvoschiks the whole evening, and Luneff never heard anything else from him. Then the inspector of an infants’ school, Grisloff, came sometimes; he was a silent man with a black beard. He liked to sing in a bass voice, “How upon the blue, blue waves,” while his wife, a tall, stout woman with big teeth, ate up all Tatiana Vlacieвна’s sweetmeats, for which exploit Mrs Avtonomoff always abused her after she had gone.

“That Felitsata Egorovna does it on purpose to spite me. She always devours everything that is sweet on the table.”

There was Alexandra Victorovna Travkina with her husband. She was tall and slight, with a big nose and short red hair. She had large eyes and a shrill voice and was constantly blowing her nose with a strange sound, as if she were tearing calico; while her husband

always spoke in a whisper—he had a sore throat—but he spoke without stopping for whole hours together, and something rustled in his mouth like dry straw. He was very well off, he served in the excise, and was a member of some charity society; they both constantly spoke of charity.

“Just imagine, what happens in our Society.”

“Yes, yes, yes—imagine!” his wife would exclaim.

“We suddenly get a petition for help.”

“In my opinion these charity societies only corrupt people.”

“A woman writes: ‘My husband is dead, I have three children and am without a bit of bread.’”

“As is always the case, you know.”

“And is given three roubles.”

“But I, I do not believe in these widows!” exclaimed Alexandra Victorovna, triumphantly.

“And my wife says to me: I will go and see what she is.”

“And what do you think was the result? Firstly, the husband had died five years ago. Secondly, there were only two children.”

“How do you like that?”

“And she is a strong woman herself. Then I went at her. ‘Do you wish to be called before the magistrate for fraud, my dear?’ She threw herself at my feet.”

“Ha, ha, ha!” laughed Kirik Avtonomoff.

And everyone admired Alexandra Victorovna for her shrewdness and abused the poor, accusing them of lying and of greediness, and of disrespect towards those who wish to do them good.

Luneff sat in his room and listened attentively to the conversation, trying to understand what they were saying about life and how they looked upon it; and what he heard he could not understand. It seemed that all these people had talked over everything long ago, had decided about everything, knew about everything, and severely condemned everyone who lived differently to them. They talked mostly about scandals in different families, about the church service

conducted by the bishop, of the bad behaviour of women and men of their acquaintance. Ilia grew tired of listening to them. Sometimes the landlord invited him to take a cup of tea with them in the evening. At the tea table Tatiana Vlacieva joked merrily, while her husband built castles in the air and thought how good it would be to throw up service, get rich all at once and buy a house.

"I would breed fowls," he said, screwing up his eyes with pleasure at the thought. "All kinds: Cochinchina, Brahmaputras, and turkey hens, turkeys and—a peacock. Yes. It's deuced good to sit near the window in a dressing-gown, smoking a fragrant cigarette, and watch your own peacock strutting about the yard with its tail spread out like a fan. Strutting about like a police-master and grumbling: brlu, brlu, brlu!"

Tatiana Vlacieva laughed in a low, appreciative way, and, glancing at Ilia, built castles in the air too.

"And I would go to the Crimea or Caucasus in the summer, and in winter I would hold sittings in a charity society. I would make myself a black cloth dress, as plain as possible, and wear no ornaments except a brooch with a ruby and pearl earrings. I read in the *Niva* a piece of poetry, in which it was said that the blood and tears of the poor would change to rubies and pearls in the next world." And, sighing softly, she concluded,—

"Rubies suit dark people wonderfully."

Ilia was silent and smiled. It was warm in the room, and clean, fragrant with good tea, and something else that was good too. The birds, curled up into fluffy balls, slept in the cages, and bright pictures hung on the walls. A small what-not stood in the space between the windows and was covered with pretty medicine boxes, china hens and different coloured Easter eggs made of sugar and glass. All this pleased Ilia and wafted a peaceful and sweet sadness over him.

But sometimes, especially on days when he was unsuccessful in business, this sadness changed into an

irritable and restless feeling. The hens, boxes and eggs irritated him, he felt a desire to go up to them and throw them all on to the floor and stamp them into pieces. This frame of mind astonished and frightened Ilia: he did not understand it, it seemed as if it were not his.

When it was on him he kept a stubborn silence, fixing his eyes in one direction and afraid of speaking, for fear of offending these good people. But one day, when he was playing cards with Avtonomoff, he could not contain himself, and, looking fixedly into Kirik Avtonomoff's face, asked in a cold voice,—

"By the way, Kirik Nikodimich, you never found out the man who strangled the merchant in Dvorianski Street?"

He asked the question and felt a particularly pleasant and burning tickling sensation in his breast.

"You mean Poluektoff?" said the commissary of police, thoughtfully, looking at his cards. And then repeated instantly? "You mean Poluektoff-f-f-f. No, I have not found out Poluektoff-f-f-f, not found him out, my dear friend. That's to say, not Poluektoff, but the one—who, I did not try to find him, and did not find him, and I did not want him; but I want to know who has the queen of spades? spades, spades, spades! Tania, you gave me three cards—queen of clubs, queen of diamonds, and—what else?"

"The seven of diamonds, think quicker."

"And so the man has quite disappeared," said Ilia, smiling insolently.

But the commissary did not pay any attention to him, absorbed in thought as to what to play.

"And so he has quite disappeared," he repeated. "And they did away with Poluektoff-f-f."

"Kiria, stop effing," said his wife. "Go quicker."

"Wait, wait, wait!"

"He must have been dexterous, the man who killed him!" Ilia would not leave off. The inattention to his words provoked his desire to speak of the murder still more.

"Dexterous?" drawled the commissary. "No, it is I who am dexterous. There!"

And, throwing his cards down noisily on the table, he went for Ilia with all five. Ilia could not cover them and was left the "fool." The couple laughed at him, and this irritated him still more. While dealing the cards, he said stubbornly,—

"One must have courage to kill a man in the middle of the day in the High Street."

"Luck, and not courage," Tatiana Vlacieвна corrected him.

Ilia looked at her, and her husband laughed softly and asked,—

"Luck to kill?"

"Why, yes! I mean—to kill and not be put into prison."

"You have given me the ace of diamonds again!" said the commissary.

"I ought to have had it!" said Ilia, seriously.

"Kill the merchant, and you will get it!" promised him Tatiana Vlacieвна, thinking over her cards.

"There! kill him and you will get an ace made of cloth, but, for the present, here you have one made of cardboard!" said Kirik, throwing Ilia two nines and the ace, and bursting into a loud laugh.*

Luneff looked at their happy and merry faces again, and his desire to talk about the murder vanished. Living in the close vicinity of these people, divided from a clean and peaceful life only by a thin wall, he experienced attacks of depression more and more often. It filled his breast like a thick, cold moisture and he could not understand from whence it came. Together with it arose thoughts about the inconsistency of life, and about God, Who knows all, but waits patiently and does not chastise. What does He wait for? From sheer dulness Luneff began to read again, his landlady had several volumes of *Niva* and *Jivopisnoe Obosrenie* and a few other tattered books. Just as in his childhood he

* Convicts sentenced for murder have a four-cornered patch of red cloth, resembling the ace of diamonds, sewn on to the middle of their backs.

liked only those tales and novels in which a strange, unknown life was described, and not the actual, unjust life which surrounded him. When he came upon stories of real life, of the life of common people, he found them dull and not true. Sometimes they amused him, and sometimes he thought such stories were told by artful people, who wished to adorn and soften the darkness and hardness of actual life. He seemed to know life well and to get to know it better and better. Walking about the streets, he saw something or other every day which put him into a criticising frame of mind; and going to the hospital, he would smile sarcastically and say to Paul,—

“Fine ways! The other day I saw several carpenters and plasterers walking along the pavement. Suddenly—a policeman cries out, ‘Oh, you devils!’ and sent them off the pavement. As much as to say, You can walk where the horses go, else you’ll soil the gentlemen with your dirty clothes. You can build houses for them, but afterwards shrink together and take care to keep aside’—ha!”

Paul flared up at this, and heaped wood upon the fire. He languished in the hospital, as if it were a prison; his thoughts gave him no peace and his eyes burned with distress and malignancy. The constant thought about Vera, where and how she was, reduced him to a state of torpor, and he grew thinner, as if he were melting. He did not like Jacob Filimonoff, and in spite of the dulness he could not make friends with him.

“To the deuce with him! He is half crazy or something,” he said to Ilia in reply to a question about Jacob.

Jacob, who had two ribs broken, lay in the hospital and was blissfully happy. He had made friends with his neighbour in the next bed, a church warder, whose leg was afflicted with sarcoma and had been cut off. He was stout and short, with an enormous bald head and a long black beard which covered his whole chest. His eyebrows were as shaggy as a moustache and he kept twitching them, while his voice sounded hollow and seemed to come from his stomach. Every time

that Luneff came to the hospital, he found Jacob sitting on the warder's bed. The warder lay silent and twitched his eyebrows, while Jacob read a Bible, that was as snort and stout as the warder himself, in a low voice:—

"The burden of Moab. Because in the night Ar of Moab is laid waste, and brought to silence; because in the night Kir of Moab is laid waste, and brought to silence!"

Jacob's voice was weak and sounded like the grating of a saw cutting through wood. He read with his hand lifted up, as if he were calling on all the invalids in the ward to listen to Isaiah's ominous prophecies. His face was still covered with blue bruises from the beating, and his big dreamy eyes in the middle of them gave his face a rather terrible expression. When he saw Ilia he would throw down his book and ask his friend anxiously always the same question,—

"Have you seen Mashutka?"

Ilia had not seen her.

"Lord!" Jacob would say sadly. "Everything has happened just like in a tale. She was there, and suddenly a sorcerer stole her, and she's no more."

"Has your father been?" asked Ilia.

"Yes, he's been again."

Jacob's face quivered and his eyes wore a frightened expression.

"He brought a pound of cringles, tea and sugar. 'You've laid here enough,' says he, 'you must get permission to leave.' I implored the doctor not to let me go from here yet. It's good here, quiet and unassuming. This is Nikita Egorich, we read together—he has a Bible. He has read it for eight years and knows it all by heart and can explain all the prophecies. When I get well I shall go with Nikita Egorich. I shall go away from my father. I will help Nikita Egorich in the church and sing in the left choir."

The warder lifted his eyebrows slowly; under them his enormous dark eyes, deeply sunk in their sockets, moved slowly. They looked into Ilia's face calmly, without any sparkle, but with a motionless dull stare,

and Luneff experienced a wish to turn away from them.

"What a good book the Bible is," cried Jacob, gasping with pleasure and forgetting Masha, his father and his dreams. "Just think what's in it? What words!"

His wide-open eyes darted from the page of his book to Ilia's face and back again, and he quivered all over with excitement.

"Do you remember what the expounder of the Gospel in the eating-house said? It's there too. 'The tabernacles of robbers prosper.' It's there, I found it. And things are still worse."

Shutting his eyes and lifting his hand, he repeated in a solemn voice:—

"'How oft is the candle of the wicked put out, and how oft cometh their destruction upon them? God distributeth sorrows in his anger.' Do you hear? 'God layeth up his iniquity for his children: he rewardeth him, and he shall know it.'"

"Is it possible that stands there?" asked Ilia, incredulously.

"Word for word."

"To my mind that's not good, it's wicked!" said Ilia.

The warder moved his eyebrows and they hid his eyes. His beard began to move, and he said in a strange, distinct and hollow voice,—

"The temerity of man, searching for truth, is not a sin, for he acts by inspiration from above."

Ilia started. While the warder sighed deeply and continued just as distinctly and slowly,—

"Truth whispers to man itself—search for me. For God is truth, and it is said, 'great is the glory to follow the Lord.'"

The warder's face, covered all over with thick hair, inspired a timidity and respect in Ilia; there was something impressive and stern in his face.

The warder's eyebrows went up, he fixed his gaze on the ceiling, and again the hair on his face moved.

"Read him, Yasha, the Book of Job, chapter the tenth."

Jacob hastily turned over several pages and read quietly in a quivering voice:—

“‘My soul is weary of my life; I will leave my complaint upon myself; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. I will say unto God, Do not condemn me; shew me wherefore thou contendest with me. Is it good unto thee that thou shouldest oppress, that thou shouldest despise the work of thine hands.’ . . .”

Ilia stretched out his neck and looked into the book, blinking his eyes.

“Don’t you believe?” exclaimed Jacob. “What a queer fellow!”

“That is not being a queer fellow, but a coward,” answered the warder, calmly, “for he cannot look God in the face.”

He turned his dull gaze slowly from the ceiling, to Ilia’s face, and continued sternly, as if he wanted to crush him with his words,—

“There are words still more distressing than those just read. Chapter the twenty-second, verse three, says straight:—

“‘Is it any pleasure to the Almighty, that thou art righteous? or is it gain to him, that thou makest thy ways perfect?’ And one must meditate a long time so as not to misunderstand these words.”

“And do you understand them?” asked Luneff, quietly.

“He?” exclaimed Jacob. “Nikita Egorich understands everything.”

But the warder lowered his voice still more and said,—

“It’s too late for me—I must get to understand death. They’ve cut off my leg, but it’s swelling further up, and the other is swelling—and my chest too—and I shall die soon.”

His eyes oppressed Ilia, and he continued slowly and calmly,—

“But I don’t want to die—for my life was a pitiful one, full of wrongs and sorrows; as for joy—I have had none in my whole life. When I was young I worked and lived under my father’s hand, like Jacob. He was a drunkard and a brute. He broke my head three

times and once scalded my feet with boiling water. I had no mother; she died at my birth. I married. My wife married me against her will—she did not love me. On the third day after the wedding she hung herself. Yes. I had a brother-in-law. He robbed me; and my sister said that I was the cause of my wife's death; everybody said so, although they knew I had not touched her, and she spewed her heart out still a girl. After that I lived nine years quite alone. It's dreadful to live alone! I kept on waiting for happiness to come. And now I'm dying. And that's all." He shut his eyes, was silent, and then asked, without looking,—
"Guess, what did I live for?"

Ilia grew pale listening to his sad tale, and fear crept into his heart. Jacob's face had grown dark and tears glistened in his eyes. They were both silent.

"What did I live for? I ask. I am wronged by the Lord. I don't ask Him to prolong my life. I do not find the words. I lie here and think—what did I live for?"

The warder's voice was spent. It broke off all of a sudden, like a muddy stream that had been running along the ground and suddenly disappeared under it.

"For to him that is joined to all the living there is nope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion," said the warder, unable to endure the silence. Again his eyebrows moved and hid his eyes. And his beard moved too. "In the Ecclesiastes it is said also: 'In the days of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other to the end that man should find nothing after him. Eh?'"

Ilia could listen no more. He got up quietly, and, shaking hands with Jacob, bowed low to the warder, in the same way that one bows before the dead. He did it unawares. This time he carried away from the hospital an uneasy feeling in his heart, something new and uncomfortable. His conversation with the warder had not put any definite thoughts into his head, but the man's sombre figure was deeply engraved on his mind. One more had been added to the number of people

wronged by life whom he knew. He remembered the warder's words well and kept turning them over in his mind, and trying to understand their hidden meaning. They disturbed him and stirred up the very depths of his heart, where he kept his faith in God's justice. The words remaining incomprehensible to him, awoke the bitter thoughts that always made him turn over and consider all the things he had seen and experienced in life.

It seemed to him now that his faith in God's justice had been shaken, and that it was not so strong as it had been before: something had eaten into it, like rust into iron. He felt clearly that this had happened to his soul; the miserable confusion caused by the warder's complaints, convinced him of this. Two forces seemed to rage in his breast which could not be united, like fire and water; and an anger against his past, and all men, and the whole order of life, started up in him with renewed force. He said to himself angrily,—

"Thoughts grow in your heart like roots in the earth, but where is the fruit?"

He wanted to tear out all these feelings and throw them away and begin the organisation of a clean, solitary and peaceful life as quickly as possible.

"One must stop mixing with people. There's no profit either for you or for them. And one cannot live like this." He walked about the streets for a long time and came home tired and gloomy.

The Avtonomoffs behaved still more kindly to him. Kirik patted him patronisingly on the shoulder, joked, and said in a stately manner,—

"You occupy yourself with trifles, my fine fellow. Such a quiet, steady lad should live on a bigger scale. For if a man has sufficient capacity to become a commissary of police, he should not serve as a policeman."

Tatiana Vlacieva began questioning Ilia carefully and in detail, as to how his business prospered and how much clear profit he got a month. He always talked to her willingly, and his respect for this woman, who knew how to arrange such a clean and pleasant life on nothing, kept growing in him. One evening when,

seized with a fit of dulness, he sat in his room near the open window and looked into the dark garden, thinking of Olimpiada, Tatiana Vlacieвна came into the kitchen and called him to tea. He went unwillingly; he was sorry to be diverted from his thoughts, and did not feel inclined to talk. He sat down to the tea table gloomy and silent, but, glancing at the Avtonomoffs, he saw that their faces wore a solemn and preoccupied expression. They were silent too. The samovar hummed pleasantly; a bird, that had awakened, was fluttering about in its cage. There was a smell of onion and eau-de-Cologne. Kirik turned round in his chair, and, rapping the edge of the table with his fingers, began singing,—

"Tir-rim, tir-rim, tar-ram-ram! Bum, bum, tra-ta-ta! tra-ta-ta!"

"Ilia Yakovlich!" the woman began impressively, "my husband and I have thought over a bit of business, and wish to talk it over with you in earnest."

"Ho, ho, ho!" The commissary suddenly burst out laughing and began rubbing his red hands. Ilia started and looked at him with astonishment.

"Be quiet, Kirik! It is quite out of place to laugh."

"We have thought it over!" exclaimed the commissary, with a broad smile, and winking at Ilia, added,—

"What an ingenious pate!"

"We have put aside a small sum of money, Ilia Yakovlich."

"We have put aside! Ho, ho, ho! My dear!"

"Kirik, be quiet!" said Tatiana Vlacieвна, severely. Her face had grown hard and still more angular.

"We have put aside about a thousand roubles," she said in a low voice, leaning towards Ilia and fixing her sharp little eyes on his.

He sat calm, but felt that something was dancing in his breast.

"This money is in the bank and gives us four per cent."

"And that is not enough, the devil take them!"

cried Kirik, bringing his hand down on the table. "We want—" but a severe glance from his wife stopped him.

"Of course four per cent. is quite sufficient. But we wish to help you to rise in the world. You are so steady." She paid Ilia a few compliments and continued,—

"You said a haberdashery would yield about twenty per cent., or perhaps even more, it depended upon the footing on which you put it. Well, we are willing to lend the money, if you will give us a promissory note—payable at sight, not otherwise, on the condition that you open a shop with it. You will do business under my control; as to the profits—we will go halves. You will insure the goods in my name, and, besides, you will give me one other document, a document of no significance, but it is necessary for form. Well, just think over it and say yes or no."

Ilia listened to her cold, high voice and rubbed his forehead. Several times during her discourse he glanced at the corner where the gilded trimmings of a holy picture glistened, with the marriage candles on each side of it. He did not wonder, but only felt an uneasiness somehow, even fear. This offer, which suddenly realised his long-standing dream, stunned him and at the same time gladdened him. He smiled in a confused way, and looked at the small woman and thought,—

"Here is my fate."

While she was saying in the tone of a mother,—

"Think well over it, examine the business from all sides. Are you able to undertake it? will you have the strength and knowledge? And then tell us—what else can you put into the business, excepting your pains? Our money is not sufficient, is that not so?"

"I can," said Ilia, slowly, "put in about five hundred roubles. My uncle will give them to me. I have an uncle, I told you about him, he can give them. Perhaps more."

"Hurrah!" cried Kirik Avtonomoff.

"That means you consent?" asked Tatiana Vlacievna.

"I consent," said Luneff.

"Why, of course!" cried the commissary, and, putting his hands into his pockets, began speaking loudly and excitedly. "Well, and now we will have some champagne. Champagne, the devil take me with my heels and all! Ilia, boy, run to a wine shop, get some champagne. We'll empty a bottle. We'll treat you. Ask for champagne from the Don at ninety copecks and say it is for Avtonomoff, then they will let you have it for sixty. Be off, sharp!"

Ilia looked at the couple's radiant faces with a smile and went off. He was thinking that Fate had knocked him about and treated him shabbily, had made him fall into heavy sin, had darkened his soul, but now seemed as if it were asking for forgiveness and smiled at him, trying to make up for all. Now the way to a clean corner of life, in which he would be able to live in peaceful solitude and soothe his soul, was open to him. He had taken life from one, but now he would help many, and in this way square accounts with the Lord. God would not exact much from him. He knows all. Olimpiada was right, in the affair of the murder he was only the hand, but not the power. And, apparently, the Lord was helping him to right himself, making the realisation of his longed-for clean life easy. Thoughts whirled in his head in a merry brawl and poured into his heart a courage unknown to him up till then.

He brought some genuine champagne from the wine shop, paying seven roubles the bottle.

"Oho!" exclaimed Avtonomoff. "This is splendid, my boy! There's an idea in this—yes!"

Tatiana Vlacieвна looked upon it differently. She shook her head reproachfully, and, having examined the bottle, said in a severe way,—

"Five roubles? Oh, oh, oh! Ilia Yakovlich, how unpractical, how giddy of you!"

Luneff, affected and happy, stood in front of her, smiling.

"It's genuine!" he said, full of joy. "I'll sip the real thing for the first time in my life. And what sort of a life was mine? It was not the true life, nothing but

dirt, coarseness, squalor, sorrows, insults, and all sorts of torments for the heart. Is that a real life? Can man live with only that?"

He had touched the sore place in his soul, a bitterness sounded in his words, his eyes darkened, and, sighing deeply, he continued strongly and firmly,—

"I have searched for the real thing from childhood, and lived like a chip in a stream, tossed from side to side, and all around me was dirty, muddy and troubled. I could not put in anywhere. I saw nothing but sorrow, injustice, robbery, and all sorts of abominations around me. And then I was thrown in your way. For the first time in my life I saw people who live quietly and cleanly, loving each other."

He looked at them with a bright smile and bowed low before them.

"Thank you. I have lightened my soul of its burden in your company, by God! You give me help for all my life at one stroke. Now I can go forward. Now I know how to live. And it will be good for me, and not bad for others. What a lot of miserable people there are in the world! How many perish in vain! I have seen it myself and know all about it."

Tatiana Vlacieвна watched him as a cat watches a bird absorbed in its song. A green light flashed in her eyes and her lips quivered. Meanwhile, Kirik was taken up with the bottle, he held it between his knees and bent over it. His neck was red and his ears moved.

"My friends, I have two friends, a girl—"

The cork flew out of the bottle, touched the ceiling, and fell on to the table. It fell on a glass and made it tinkle.

Kirik poured the wine out into the glasses and said, smacking his lips,—

"Take them!"

And when his wife and Luneff had taken up their glasses, he lifted his glass high above his head, and cried,—

"Success to the firm 'Tatiana Avtonomoff and Luneff'—hurrah!"

CHAPTER XXIII

FOR several days running Ilia discussed with Tatiana Vlacieva all the details of the enterprise they had devised. She knew everything and talked about everything with as much conviction as if she had sold haberdashery all her life. Ilia listened to her with a smile in silence, and wondered. He wanted to look for an apartment at once, and begin business as soon as possible, and he consented to all Mrs Avtonomoff's conditions without considering their significance.

At last everything was settled—it appeared that Tatiana Vlacieva had even an apartment in view. It was exactly what Ilia had dreamt of: a small shop, with a room for the shopkeeper, in a clean street. Ilia knew the shop, it had formerly been a milk shop, and he had often gone in with his goods. Everything went well, even to the least trifles, and Luneff was exultant.

Full of courage and joy, he went to the hospital to see his friends, and there he was met by Paul, joyful also.

"To-morrow I am going!" he announced excitedly to Ilia, before he had even said good-morning. "I got a letter from Vera. She scolds me—'You've wronged me,' says she. The little devil!"

His eyes sparkled, his cheeks were flushed, he could not stand still, and tapped on the floor with his slippers and waved his arms.

"Look out!" said Ilia to him. "Take care of yourself."

"I? All is decided. The question will stand thus: 'Ma'm'selle Vera Kapitolinovna, will you marry me? Be so kind! No? A knife into your heart!'"

A shiver ran up Paul's body and face.

"Dear, dear!" said Ilia, smiling. "A knife indeed, hot head!"

"No. I've had enough. I can't live without her, and she has no business to live without me. She's seen enough filth—she ought to be satisfied; as for me, I'm quite sated. To-morrow all will be decided this way or that."

Luneff looked at his friend's face and said to himself,—

"He is capable of killing her."

And suddenly a clear, simple thought flashed into his mind. He blushed and smiled.

"Pashutka! Do you know, I have found my happiness?" And Luneff told his friend all about it in a few words.

Paul listened to him, bent his head, and said, with a sigh,—

"Y-yes, you're in luck."

"Are you envious?"

"Of course—devil!"

"I'm in such luck that I even feel ashamed, really! It's the truth I'm saying."

"Thanks for that at least," said Paul, gloomily.

"Do you know?" said Ilia, quietly. "I am not boasting, but really mean that I feel ashamed—by God!"

Paul glanced at him in silence, and hung his head again thoughtfully.

"And I wanted to say, we lived in sorrow together, let's share the joy too."

"M-m—" mumbled Paul. "I've heard say that joy can't be shared with more than one woman."

"It can! Just ask what is necessary for a plumber's workshop, what instruments, materials and all, and how much it costs. And I'll give you the money."

"O-o-oh!" drawled Paul, incredulously. Luneff caught hold of his hand tightly and pressed it warmly.

"What a queer fellow you are! I'll give it."

But it took him a long time to convince Paul that he was earnest in his intention. The latter kept shaking his head and mumbling, and said,—

“Things like that don’t happen.”

Luneff at last convinced him. Then Paul hugged him in his turn, and said in a broken, hollow voice,—

“Thank you, brother. You’re dragging me out of a pit. Only listen: I don’t want a workshop—to the devil with workshops! I know them. Give me the money and I’ll take Vera and go away from here. That’ll be easier for you too—I shall want less money—and it’s more convenient for me. I’ll go away somewhere and enter into a workshop myself.”

“That’s bosh!” said Ilia. “It’s best to be your own master.”

“What sort of a master will I make?” exclaimed Paul, merrily. “I don’t know how to comport myself with workmen. No, a business of my own and all that is not to my mind. I know, brother, what it is to be master! I’m not fit! One can’t change a goat into a pig.”

Luneff did not quite understand Paul’s attitude towards owning a business of his own, but he liked it, and felt still more disposed in his friend’s favour. He looked at him kindly and merrily, and said,—

“But it’s true you resemble a goat—you are just as lean. Do you know you look like shoemaker Perfishka, really! Well then, come to-morrow and take the money for the present, while you have no situation. And I will go to Jacob now.”

“All right! Thank you, brother!”

“On what terms are you with Jacob?”

“Somehow we don’t get on together,” smiled Gratchoff.

“He’s a miserable fellow. It’s hard for him to serve,” said Ilia, thoughtfully.

“Well, we all have enough of that,” answered Paul, shrugging his shoulders. “I keep thinking he isn’t in his right senses. He’s a clodhopper.”

“Well, I’m off.”

“All right.”

And when Ilia left him, he called out once more, standing in the middle of the corridor,—

“Thank you, brother!”

Ilia smiled and nodded.

He found Jacob sad and upset. He was lying on his pallet with his face towards the ceiling, and was looking upwards with wide-open eyes, and did not notice when Ilia came up to him.

“They’ve taken Nikita Egorich to another ward,” he said to Ilia dismally.

“That’s good,” said Ilia, approvingly. “He’s too terrible. And his discourses are— Let him go, for goodness’ sake.”

Jacob looked at him reproachfully and was silent.

“Are you getting better?” asked Ilia.

“Y-yes,” answered Jacob, with a sigh. “I am not even able to be ill as long as I like. My father came again yesterday. ‘I’ve bought a house,’ says he. He wants to open another eating-house. And all this falls on me.”

Ilia wanted to gladden his friend with his own happiness, but something hindered him from speaking.

The cheerful spring sun looked in at the window, but it made the yellow walls of the hospital seem still yellower. Stains and cracks became more evident in the plaster, lit up by the sunshine. Two invalids, sitting on their pallets, were deeply absorbed in playing cards, throwing them down in silence. A tall, thin man was walking noiselessly about the ward with his bound head bent low. All was quiet, although a smothered cough reached them from somewhere and one heard the rustle of the invalids’ slippers in the corridor. Jacob’s yellow face was lifeless and his dim eyes had a melancholy expression.

“If I could only die!” he was saying in his dry, creaking voice. “I lie here and say to myself: it’s interesting to die. It must be quite different there, something quite exceptional, seen by nobody. There is no noise. All is comprehensible, clear and radiant.” His voice fell and became lower. “The angels are kind. They can answer all one’s questions, explain

all—angels.” He was silent, and, blinking his eyes, began watching a pale ray of light that danced on the ceiling, reflected by something.

“Do you know—” said Luneff.

But Jacob interrupted him.

“Have you seen Mashutka?”

“N-no.”

“Oh, dear! you ought to go and see her.”

“Somehow it never enters my mind.”

“It ought to enter your heart.”

Luneff felt abashed and was silent. A short man on crutches, with his moustache twisted into a point, came in from the corridor and said to an invalid with a bound up arm,—

“Shurka, the rogue, hasn’t come again.”

Jacob glanced at him, sighed, and began moving his head about on the pillow restlessly.

“Nikita Egorich, here, does not want to die, but will. The assistant surgeon told me he would die! And I want to die—but can’t. When I get well I shall have to go to the eating-house again. I shall drink vodka, and will be lost.”

His lips parted slowly into a sad smile. He looked at his friend in a strange way and began to speak again.

“One must have iron ribs and an iron heart to be able to live in this world, or else live like everybody else, with neither thought, nor conscience.”

Ilia felt something unfriendly and dry in Jacob’s words, and he scowled.

“I am like glass amidst stones; as soon as I move I crack.”

“You love to complain!” said Luneff, vaguely.

“And you?” asked Jacob.

Ilia turned away and was silent. Then, seeing, that Jacob was not going to speak, he said thoughtfully,—

“It’s hard for everybody. Paul, for instance.”

“I don’t like him,” said Jacob, wrinkling his face.

“Why?”

“So—I don’t like him.”

"And I like him."

"Well, that's all right."

"Heigho! I must go."

Jacob put out his hand to him in silence and suddenly asked piteously, like a beggar,—

"Find out about Mashutka, eh? For Christ's sake!"

"All right!" said Ilia.

He felt pained and awkward listening to Jacob's melancholy talk, and when he left he heaved a sigh of relief. Jacob's request to find out how Masha was awakened something very much like shame in him for his behaviour towards Perfishka's daughter, and he decided to go to Matitsa, who knew for certain how Masha was getting on. He knew, as well as everyone else who inhabited their street, that Matitsa used to go to shopkeeper Krenoff on Saturdays to wash the floors, and was paid twenty-five copecks, including in this sum the payment for her caresses.

CHAPTER XXIV

HE walked along in the direction of Filimonoff's eating-house, and dreams of the future sprang up in his heart, one after the other. The future smiled at him, and, absorbed in his thoughts, he imperceptibly walked past the eating-house; when he noticed his mistake he did not feel inclined to go back. He walked on out of the town: a field, encompassed in the distance by a dark wall of forest, spread out before him. The sun was going down, and on the young green grass lay a pink reflection. Ilia walked along with his head lifted up, and looked at the sky, where, far away, reddish clouds stood motionless above the earth, and burnt in the rays of the sun. It was pleasant to walk, each step and each breath of air aroused a new dream in him. He pictured himself rich and powerful, ruining Petruha Filimonoff. He had brought him to ruin already, and Petruha stood before him wailing, while he, Ilia Luneff, was saying,—

"So I must pity you? And did you ever pity anybody? Didn't you torture your son? Didn't you make my uncle fall into a heavy sin? Didn't you make sport of me? In your cursed house nobody was happy, nobody had any joy. Your house is rotten, a trap set for people, a prison for them."

Petruha trembles and groans with fear before him, as piteous as a beggar. And Ilia storms at him,—

"I'll burn your house down, for it's a misery to everybody, and you can wander about the earth and beg for pity from those wronged by you—wander, till you die, and spue your heart out from hunger, like a dog!"

The evening twilight enveloped the field, and the forest in the distance became densely black, like a mountain. A bat, like a small black dot, flitted about

noiselessly in the air, and it seemed as if the darkness was being sowed by it. Far away on the river the noise of a steamer's paddle-wheels in the water was heard; it sounded as if an enormous bird were flying somewhere far away, and it was the mighty flap of its broad wings that made the air tremble. Luneff thought of all the people who had spoiled his life, and punished them in his imagination without mercy. Then he felt a still greater joy and light-heartedness; and, all alone in the field, with the darkness pressing around him, he began to sing softly.

Suddenly a smell of rot and manure was diffused in the air. Ilia stopped singing, this smell awoke pleasant remembrances. He had come to the place where the refuse of the whole town was amassed, to the ravine where he had rummaged with Grandfather Jeremiah. The smell of rotting seemed to Ilia to be still stronger and more biting than in his childhood. The figure of the rag-picker rose up in Ilia's memory, and he glanced round, trying to find in the darkness the spot where the old man had liked to rest. But that spot existed no longer, it must have been filled up with rubbish. Ilia sighed, feeling that something was gone from his heart, that something was buried there in the darkness.

"If I had not strangled the merchant my life would be quite happy now," he suddenly thought; and then something in his heart seemed to respond.

"What does the merchant matter? He's my misfortune, but not sin."

A noise was heard, a small dog slipped from under his feet and disappeared with a low howl. He started; it seemed as if a part of the night's darkness had come to life and disappeared with a groan.

"It's all the same," he said to himself. "There would have been no peace in my heart, merchant or no merchant. How many insults to myself and others have I seen? If one's heart is scratched once it will ache for ever."

He paced the edge of the ravine slowly, his feet sank into the rubbish, chips crackled under his feet and paper

rustled. A piece of ground, not covered with rubbish, cut into the ravine like a narrow promontory; he went along it, and, reaching the end, sat down with his legs dangling from the edge. The air here was fresher, and, looking down the ravine, Ilia saw in the distance the river, like a steel-coloured line. On the surface, which was as motionless as ice, the lights of invisible boats quivered softly, one of them moved in the air like a red bird, while another, green and ominous, burnt with a steady light, sending forth no rays. At Ilia's feet, the wide jaws of the ravine were filled with a dense darkness, and resembled a river in which waves of black air flowed silently. A great sadness enveloped Luneff, he looked down and thought,—

“I felt happy just now, and light-hearted, something seemed to smile at me, and—disappeared. Why does life push a man on, against his will, to where he does not wish to go? Everything in life is wretched, unjust and incomprehensible. Perhaps Jacob spoke the truth when he said one must, first of all, get to understand oneself, and yet, perhaps, one must get to understand other people first. How do they live? By what laws? He remembered in what an unfriendly way Jacob had spoken to him that day, and he felt still sadder. Something rustled in the ravine, probably a piece of earth, torn away from the edge. Ilia stretched out his neck and looked down into the darkness. He got a whiff of the night's dampness in his face. He looked up at the sky. There the stars were coming out timidly, and, from out of the forest, the moon, like a great red ball, an enormous insensible eye, rose slowly. And in the same way as the bat had flitted about in the twilight in Ilia's heart gloomy thoughts and remembrances began passing quickly; they came and disappeared unanswered, and the darkness in his soul became denser and more distressing. “Men rob, and torment, and strangle each other, and nobody ever helps another to live, but everybody tries to keep aside, where it is more peaceful. Here am I crawling into a corner too. What is there real and incontestible?”

He sat and meditated for a long time, glancing first

downwards into the ravine, then up at the sky. In the field all was still. The rays of the moon, peeping into the darkness of the ravine, revealed deep cracks and bushes on its sides. Ugly shadows fell on the ground from these bushes. In the sky there were only the stars and moon. At last Ilia began to get chilled ; he got up, and, shivering from the freshness of the night, went slowly across the field in the direction of the town lights. He did not wish to think of anything : in that hour his heart was filled with a cold indifference.

He came home late, and, standing before the door irresolutely, felt embarrassed about ringing. There were no lights in the windows, consequently the inmates were asleep. He did not like to disturb Tatiana Vlacieva, she always opened the door herself. But nevertheless he must enter the house. Luneff pulled the handle of the bell slightly. Almost instantly the door opened and the landlady's slight figure, clad all in white, appeared before him.

"Shut the door quickly," she said to Ilia in a voice he did not know. "It's cold. I am undressed—my husband is not at home."

"I beg your pardon," mumbled Luneff.

"How late you are. Where have you come from, eh?"

Ilia locked the door and turned round to answer her, and found the woman's breast right before him. She did not step backwards to give him room, but seemed to press closer to him. He could not step backwards either ; the door was behind him. Suddenly she began to laugh softly, a quivering laugh. Luneff lifted his hands and put them, palm downwards, carefully on the woman's shoulders, and his hands trembled with agitation and his desire to put his arms round her. Then she drew herself up somehow all of a sudden, put her thin, burning arms clingly round his neck, and said in a ringing voice,—

"Where do you wander about at nights? Why, eh? You can have it nearer, for a long time, dear one. My handsome one! my strong one!"

Ilia caught her kisses, like one in a dream, and

staggered from the convulsive movements of her supple body, while she clung to his breast like a cat, and kept kissing him. He caught her up in his strong arms and carried her to his room, walking as lightly as if he were moving on air.

The next morning Ilia awoke with fear in his heart. "How can I look into Kirik's eyes now?" said he to himself the instant he opened his eyes. Besides fear of the commissary of police, he experienced a feeling of shame.

"If I had a spite against the man at least, or did not like him! But I have wronged him, and how greatly, too, mortally, for nothing, just simply—" thought he, with fear in his heart, and an angry feeling towards Tatiana Vlacieva stirred in him. It seemed to him that Kirik would certainly perceive his wife's perfidy, and he could not imagine what would happen then.

"And why did she throw herself at me, as if she were famished?" he asked himself in miserable perplexity, but the same instant he experienced a pleasant sensation of something that tickled his self-conceit. It was not a merchant's mistress, as he inwardly called Olimpiada, who had noticed him, but a real lady—pure, educated, and a lawful wife.

"That means there is something unusual about me," arose the vain-glorious thought. "It's shameful, shameful, but then I'm not made of stone, I could not send her away."

He was young: he recalled the woman's caresses, which were peculiar somehow, different to those he had experienced before; but he was practical: he thought involuntarily of the many different advantages this intimacy would give him; and these thoughts were followed by others, which surrounded him like a dark thunder-cloud.

"Again I'm squeezed into a corner. Did I wish it? I respected the woman, a bad thought about her never entered my head, and this is what has come of it." And then all the trouble in his soul and all the contradictions were overwhelmed by the joyful thought that very soon now the real clean life would

begin. But the same biting thought would rise up again,—

“It would have been better without this.”

He did not get up until Avtonomoff had gone off to his service, on purpose, and he heard the commissary smacking his lips with relish and say to his wife,—

“So, Tania, you will make some meat dumplings for dinner, won’t you? Put more pork into them and roast them a bit, you know. So that they will look at me from the dish, like little pink pigs, m-m-a! And, darling, put more pepper into the meat. And I will buy you some sweets, yes.”

“Well, well, get along! Just as if I did not know your tastes,” said his wife, lovingly.

“Darling Tania, give me a little kiss!”

On hearing the sound of a kiss, Luneff started. It was disagreeable and comical.

“Chic, chic, chic!” said Avtonomoff, kissing his wife.

And she laughed. She shut the door after her husband, and, skipping into Ilia’s room, sprang on to his bed, crying merrily,—

“Kiss me quickly—I’m in a hurry!”

Ilia said gloomily,—

“But you’ve just been kissing your husband.”

“Wha-at? You? But he is jealous!” the woman exclaimed, with pleasure, and, jumping off the bed and laughing, she began drawing the window-curtains to, saying,—

“Jealous, that is good! People who are jealous love passionately.”

“I did not speak out of jealousy.”

“Silence!” commanded she, playfully, covering his mouth with her hand.

When they had done kissing, Ilia looked at her with a smile and could not forbear from saying,—

“Well, you are daring—a real hot head! To undertake such a thing under your husband’s nose!”

Her green eyes flashed provokingly and she exclaimed,—

"It is quite the usual thing and nothing out of the common. Do you think there are many women who have no love affairs? Only ugly and sick ones have none. But a pretty woman always likes to have a love affair."

She enlightened Ilia on the subject the whole morning, telling him merrily tales about the way women dupe their husbands. She wore a red blouse and an apron, her sleeves were tucked up, and, alert and light, she fluttered about the kitchen like a bird, preparing meat dumplings for her husband, and her ringing voice poured incessantly into Ilia's ears.

"So you think a husband is quite sufficient for a woman? A husband can sometimes be very unpleasant even if you do love him. And then he has no scruples about being false to his wife, if only a suitable object turns up. And it is dull for a woman to remember nothing but—husband, husband, husband, her whole life long! It is amusing to play with another man: you get to know at least what kinds of men exist and what difference there is between them. There are different kinds of kvass too: ordinary kvass, Bavarian kvass, kvass made of the juniper and moor berry. And it is very silly to always drink ordinary kvass."

Ilia listened and drank his tea, and somehow the tea seemed bitter. In the woman's words there was something disagreeable, jarring and new to him. He thought involuntarily of Olimpiada, of her low voice, calm movements, passionate words, in which one felt something strong, that touched one at times. Of course Olimpiada was a person without any education, the daughter of some junior clerk, a simple woman. That was the reason, perhaps, why she was simpler in her shamelessness. So answering Tatiana Vlacieвна, Ilia forced himself to laugh. He did not feel merry, and laughed only because he did not know what to say to his landlady. Her discourse made him feel even sad, but he listened to it with interest, and at last said thoughtfully,—

"I did not think such things could happen in your clean life."

"The order of life, my dear, is the same everywhere. The order of life is made by men, and all men desire only to live well. A man wants to live like a human being—peacefully, satisfied and comfortable, and for all this he must have money. Consequently, first of all, a man needs money. Money is acquired through inheritance, through luck and by work. Those who have lottery tickets can trust in luck. A woman has her lottery ticket from nature—her beauty. One can obtain much by one's beauty. And those who have neither rich relations, nor lottery tickets, nor beauty, must work. To have to work one's whole life is a shame. I work although I possess two lottery tickets. But I have decided to pawn them for your shop. Two tickets are not sufficient. To make meat dumplings and kiss a pimply commissary of police is dull! That is why I wanted to kiss you."

She glanced at Ilia and asked playfully,—

"Is it repugnant to you? Why do you look at me so angrily?"

Ilia stood in the door of his room, and looked at her with knitted brows. She went up to him, put her hands on his shoulders and looked curiously into his face.

"I'm not angry," said Ilia.

She burst out laughing, and exclaimed through her mirth,—

"Indeed! Oh, thank you, how kind you are!"

"I was thinking," continued Ilia, articulating the words slowly, "that what you say seems to be true—but somehow it is not good."

"Oho! what a hedgehog you are! What is not good? Just explain."

But he could not explain anything to her. He did not understand himself what it was he did not like in her words. Olimpiada said things much worse and coarser, but she never jarred upon his feelings so unpleasantly as this clean little bird did. He pondered fixedly over the strange feeling aroused in him by this new, flattering intimacy the whole day and could not understand where it came from.

When he returned home, Kirik met him in the kitchen, and announced joyously,—

“W-well, Ilia, what a dish Tania has cooked us to-day! Such meat dumplings—it’s a pity to eat them! One feels as much pity and shame as if they were live nightingales one was eating. I even kept back a plateful for you. Take your shop off your neck, sit down, eat, and see what metal we are made of!”

Ilia looked at him guiltily and laughed softly, saying,—
“Thank you, Kirik Nikodimich.”

Then he added, with a sigh,—

“You’re a good man, by God.”

“Oh, what is that you are saying?” exclaimed Kirik, waving his hand in self-defence. “A plate of meat dumplings is a trifle! No, my fine fellow, if I were the police-master—h’m—then you might say ‘thank you’ to me—oh, yes. But I shall never be a police-master, and I am going to throw up serving in the police. I shall probably become the confidential clerk of some merchant, that will be better! The confidential clerk of a merchant is a big-wig. It is an important position. Occupying such a post, I shall be able to amass a small fortune very soon.”

Tatiana Vlacievna bustled about near the oven, singing softly. Ilia glanced at her and felt an awkwardness and embarrassment again. But, little by little, this sensation disappeared under the influence of new impressions and new cares. He had little time for meditating now as he had to busy himself a great deal with putting the shop in order and buying the goods. Gradually, and quite imperceptibly, he began to get accustomed to the woman, like a drunkard does to vodka. As a mistress she improved with time, although her caresses often aroused a feeling of shame in him and even fear of her; and these caresses, joined to her conversation, slowly banished all respect for the woman. Every morning after seeing her husband off, or in the evening, when he was on duty, she called Ilia to her room or came into his and told him different stories of life. And all these stories were somehow wonderfully simple, as if they took place in a country

inhabited by rogues of both sexes, who walked about naked, and their chief pleasure was the sin of flesh.

"Is it possible that all that is true?" asked Ilia, gloomily. He did not want to believe her words, but he felt quite helpless and could not refute them.

She laughed and argued it out convincingly, kissing him the while.

"Let us begin from those above us: the governor lives with the wife of the manager of the court of exchequer, and the manager abducted the wife of one of the clerks not long ago, took lodgings for her in Sobachipereulok, and goes to see her twice a week quite openly. I know her, she is quite a girl and has not been married a year; while her husband was sent into the district as supervisor of taxes. I know him too. What sort of supervisor can he make?—a person of shallow education, a fool and a lackey."

She told him of merchants who bought young girls to corrupt them, of merchants' wives who had lovers, of young girls of good family who, becoming pregnant, caused abortions.

Ilia listened, and life seemed something like a sewer in which men crawl about like worms.

"Faugh!" he would say wearily. "But is there something real and pure anywhere, tell me?"

"How something real? What do you mean?" asked Tatiana Vlacieva in astonishment.

"Why, something real!" Luneff would exclaim irritably.

"But I am telling you of real things. What a queer fellow. I did not invent it all."

"I am not speaking of that. There is something real somewhere, isn't there, that's to say—something pure. Yes or no?"

She did not understand and laughed at him. Sometimes her conversation took another direction. Looking into his face, with eyes that sparkled with a green fearful light, she asked,—

"Tell me how you came to know for the first time what a woman is?"

Ilia was ashamed of that remembrance, it was re-

pugnant to him. He turned away from the fulsome glance of his mistress, and said in a hollow voice, reproachfully,—

“What filthy things you do ask; you ought to be ashamed. Even men don’t tell each other such things.”

But she pressed him, laughing merrily, and sometimes Luneff felt as if her shameful words stuck to him, like pitch. When she saw an unfriendly expression in Ilia’s face, a weariness and pain in his eyes, she boldly aroused the male in him and annulled all disgust for herself by her caresses.

One day, on coming home from the shop, in which carpenters were fitting up shelves, Ilia found Matitsa in the kitchen, to his astonishment. She was sitting at the table, with her great hands upon it, and talked to the landlady, who was standing near the oven.

“Here,” said Tatiana Vlacieвна, with a smile, nodding in the direction of Matitsa, “this lady has been waiting for you a long time.”

“Good-morning!” said the lady, getting up from the bench with difficulty.

“Bah!” exclaimed Ilia. “Are you still alive?”

“Even a pig won’t eat a rotten trunk,” answered Matitsa in a husky voice.

Ilia had not seen Matitsa for a long time, and now looked at her with a mixed feeling of pleasure and pity. She had a tattered fustian dress on, her head was wrapped in a shawl, yellow from age, and her feet were bare. Drawing them with difficulty along the floor, and steadying herself with her hands against the wall, she slowly tumbled into Ilia’s room and sank heavily into a chair, saying in a hoarse, expressionless voice,—

“I’ll spue my soul out soon. I’m losing the use of my feet, and when I quite lose them I won’t be able to earn my bread, and then I will die.”

Her face was swollen dreadfully and covered all over with dark spots, her enormous eyes were hidden by swellings and had become quite narrow.

“What are you staring at my face for?” she asked Ilia. “Do you think I’ve been beaten? Nothing of the sort, it’s my illness that is eating into me.”

"How do you get on?" asked Ilia.

"I live by standing in the church porches gathering coppers," droned Matitsa, indifferently. "I've come to you on business. I was told by Perfishka that you were living with a clerk, and came."

"Shall I give you some tea?" offered Luneff. It was disagreeable to him to listen to Matitsa's voice and see her big, flabby body falling into decay before she was dead.

"Let the devils wash their tails with your tea! Better give me five copecks, there! I have come to you—ask me what for?" She spoke with difficulty, her breath was short and a stifling smell came from her.

"Well, what for?" asked Ilia, turning away from her and remembering how he had insulted her once.

"Do you remember Masha? Ah! you've done away with your memory! You've grown rich."

"Yes, yes, I remember!" said Ilia, hastily.

"And what use is it if you do remember?" asked the woman, echoing Ilia's words. "Is her life any easier for that?"

"How is she—how is she getting on?"

Matitsa shook her head slowly and said curtly,—

"She has not hung herself yet."

"Speak out straight!" cried Ilia, angrily. "What are you reproaching me for? You sold her yourself for three roubles."

"I'm not reproaching you, but myself," replied the woman, calmly, and began telling about Masha slowly with sundry details, getting quite out of breath with the effort.

"Her old husband is jealous and torments Masha. He does not let her go anywhere, not even into the shop; she stays in the room with the children and dares not even go into the yard without asking the old man. Now the old man has got rid of his children somehow; he has given them away to somebody and lives alone with Masha. He pinches her and binds her hands. He makes sport of her like that because his first wife was untrue to him, and neither of the children are the old man's. Masha ran away from him twice, but the police caught her both times and brought her

back to her husband, and he pinched her for it and made her starve. That's the life she leads!"

"Yes, you and Perfishka did a fine bit of business!" said Ilia, gloomily.

"I thought it would be better like that," said the woman in her expressionless voice. Her face, as motionless as if it had been made of stone, and her dead voice oppressed Ilia.

"I thought it would be purer! But we ought to have done what was worse. We ought to have sold her, as I intended, to a rich man. He would have given her a lodging and clothing, and everything. She could have sent him about his business afterwards and lived like everybody else lives. Many live like that—they begin with an old man."

"Well, and what have you come for?" asked Ilia.

"You live with the police. There! they always catch her. Tell him not to catch her. Let her run away! Perhaps she'll be able to run away somewhere. Is there no place for a human being to run to?"

"Did you really come for that?"

"Of course, and let them leave her in peace—ask them to."

"Oh! you people!" exclaimed Ilia, and began thinking what he could do for Masha.

Matitsa rose from her chair, moving her feet carefully along the floor. She sighed and groaned, and it seemed as if it were not a human being who was moving, but an old, decayed tree falling slowly to the ground.

"Good-bye! we shall not meet again. I shall die soon," muttered she. "Thank you, you clean, rich man! Thank you, thank you!"

When she had gone out through the kitchen door, the landlady rushed into Ilia's room, and, putting her arms round him, asked, laughing,—

"Was she your first love, yes?"

"Who-o?" asked Ilia, slowly, absorbed in remembrances of Masha.

"That great woman?"

Ilia drew his mistress's arms, which were clasped tightly round his neck, apart, and said in a surly tone,—

"She can scarcely drag her feet, but still bestirs herself in behalf of those she loves."

"Whom does she love?" asked the woman, with astonishment and curiosity, observing Ilia's troubled face.

"Stop, Tatiana," said Ilia, "wait a bit! Don't joke."

He told her briefly all about Masha, and asked,—

"What can be done?"

"There is nothing to be done," answered Tatiana Vlacieva, shrugging her shoulders. "By the law a wife belongs to her husband, and nobody has any right to take her away from him."

And with the important look of a person who knows all the laws and is firmly convinced of their stability, Mrs Avtonomoff talked to Ilia for a long time about the necessity of Masha submitting to everything her husband exacted.

"She must bear it for the present. Let her wait. He is old and will die soon, then she will be free, all his property will go to her. And you will marry the rich young widow—yes!"

She laughed, and then continued instructing Ilia.

"But it would be best of all if you threw up all your old acquaintances entirely. Now they are not your equals, and can even put you out of countenance. They are all dirty and coarse—for instance, the one who borrowed money from you. A thin man, with vicious eyes."

"Gratchoff?"

"Yes. What funny birds' names common people do have. Gratchoff, Luneff, Petuhoff, Skvortsoff.* People of our class have nicer names, Avtonomoff, Korsakoff. My father was a Florianoff. And when I was a girl, a candidate of the bar, Gloriantoff, courted me. One day on the ice ring he took off my garter, and threatened he would make a scandal if I did not come myself to fetch it."

Ilia listened to her tales and thought of his past, and felt as if invisible threads were binding him tightly to Petruha Filimonoff's house; and it seemed to him that that house would for ever stand up between him and a peaceful life.

* The words gratch, lun, ckvoret and petuh, from which the names are derived, are the names of birds, and mean—rook, bald kite, starling and cock.

CHAPTER XXV

AT last Ilia's dream was realised.

Full of a calm joy, he stood from morning till night behind the counter in his shop, admiring it. Around him different cases and pasteboard boxes were prettily arranged on the shelves; in the windows he had made a show, laying out bright buckles for belts, purses, soap, buttons, and hanging up bright-coloured ribbons, lace and tape. Everything was clean and light and flashed in the sun with all the colours of the rainbow. Grave and handsome, he greeted all his customers with a polite bow, and adroitly scattered about specimens of his goods on the counter. In the rustle of lace and ribbons he heard pleasant music, and all the dressmakers, who came to make purchases for the sum of a few copecks, seemed pretty and charming to him. Life suddenly became pleasant and easy, a simple and clear meaning appeared in it, and the past seemed to be hidden by a mist. He thought of nothing but trade, goods and customers. He took a boy to help him, gave him a grey jacket to wear and saw that he washed himself carefully as often as possible.

"Gavrik, we have to handle delicate wares," he would say to him, "and must be clean."

Gavrik was about twelve years old, he was stout and slightly marked with the smallpox, snub-nosed, with little grey eyes and a lively face. He had just done learning in the town school, and considered himself grown up and serious. His duties in the little clean shop interested him too, he busied himself with the boxes and cases with pleasure, and tried to behave towards the customers as politely as the owner. But he did not succeed very well; the talent for mimicry was too strongly developed in him, and all kinds of grimaces, the more or less successful reproduction of

his customers' expressions, were constantly appearing on his rough little face. He reconciled himself to the existence of little girls with difficulty, and only on rare occasions could he abstain from the irresistible desire to pinch and push them, pulling their hair, and, as a rule, causing his little customers all sorts of unpleasantness. Ilia watched him and thought of himself, when he served in the fishmonger Stroganoff's shop; and, feeling a particular goodwill towards the boy, he talked and joked with him patronisingly when there were no customers in the shop.

"Gavrik, read books when you have spare time, so as not to feel dull," he advised his helper. "It is pleasant to read and the time passes imperceptibly."

Luneff had become mild and attentive to everyone, and his smile seemed to say,—

"I'm in luck, you know. But be patient. Good fortune will soon befall you too, for sure."

He opened his shop at seven o'clock in the morning and closed it at ten. There were not many customers, and Luneff sat on a chair at the door, basking in the rays of the spring sunshine, and rested, thinking of nothing and desiring nothing. Gavrik sat also in the door, observing all the passers-by, and mimicking them; he called all the dogs, threw stones at the pigeons and sparrows, or else read a book, breathing through his nose in an excited way. Sometimes his master made him read out loud, but reading did not interest Luneff any more, he kept listening to the stillness and calm in his heart. He listened to it blissfully, saturating himself with it, it was new to him and inexpressibly sweet. But at times this sweet calm was broken in upon by a strange, scarcely perceptible feeling, a foreboding of trouble; it did not destroy the calm in his soul, but only touched it lightly, like a shadow.

Then Ilia would begin speaking to the boy.

"Gavrik! what does your father do?"

"He's a postman—carries letters."

"And is your family a large one?"

"Yes, it's a large one. There are lots of us. Some are grown up, and some are still little."

"How many little ones?"

"Five, and three grown-up. All the grown-up ones have situations. I'm employed by you, Vasili is in Siberia, and serves in a telegraph-office, and Sonka gives lessons. She's stunning! She brings home about twelve roubles a month. And then there is Mishka, he's nothing much. He older than me but learns in the gymnasium."

"That means there are four grown-up ones, and not three."

"Why, how is that?" exclaimed Gavrik, and added instructively, "Mishka only learns yet, grown-up people are those who work."

"Do you live poorly?"

"Oh, of course," answered Gavrik, calmly, and breathed noisily through his nose. Then he began telling Ilia his plans for the future.

"When I'm grown up I shall be a soldier. There'll be war, and I shall go off to the war. I'm brave—I'll dash at the enemy in front of everyone and seize their banner. My uncle took a banner like that, and General Gurka gave him a cross and five roubles."

Ilia listened to Gavrik's dreams and smiled, looking at his pock-marked face and broad, constantly-twitching nose. In the evening, after closing the shop, Ilia went into the little room behind the counter. There the samovar, got ready by the boy, boiled, and bread and sausage were laid out on the table. Gavrik drank a glass of tea, ate a piece of bread, and went into the shop to sleep, while Ilia sat at table a long time, sometimes for an hour or two.

Two chairs, a table, a bed and a cupboard for the dishes comprised all the furniture of his new abode. The room was narrow and low, with a square window, out of which he could see the feet of the passers-by, the roof of the house on the opposite side of the street and the sky above it. He hung a white muslin curtain over the window, which was protected on the outside by an iron grating, greatly disliked by Ilia. Above his bed he hung a picture, "The Steps of a Man's Life." This picture pleased Ilia, and he had wanted to buy it for a long

time, but did not until he had opened his shop, although it cost only ten copecks.

"The steps of a man's life" were depicted under an arch, over which heaven was represented. The God of Sabaoth, surrounded by flowers and a halo, was talking to Adam and Eve. There were seventeen steps in all. The first was a child, supported by its mother, and underneath "the first steps" stood in red letters. The second was a child beating a drum and dancing, while the inscription underneath said, "five years old, playing." At the age of seven they had "begun to teach him," at ten he "goes to school," at twenty-one he stands with a gun in his hands and a smile on his face, and underneath is written, "he is serving his time in the army." In the next he is twenty-five, he is in a dress coat, with his hat under one arm and a bouquet of flowers in his hand "a bridegroom." Then he grows a beard, puts on a long surtout and a pink tie, and, standing by the side of a stout woman in a yellow dress, is shaking her hands. Further on he is thirty-five, he is standing at an anvil, in his shirt, with the sleeves rolled up and is forging. On the top step he is sitting in a red arm-chair and is reading the newspaper, while his wife and four children listen to him; he and his family are all well dressed and clean, and their faces have a healthy and contented look; he is now fifty. But after this the steps begin to go down, the man's beard is grey and he is dressed in a long yellow coat, and he holds a bag with a fish and a jug in his hands. Under this step is written, "domestic labour," on the next the man is nursing his grandchild, lower still he "is led," for he is eighty, and on the last step he is ninety-five and is sitting in an arm-chair with his feet in a coffin, while Death stands behind his back with a scythe in his hands. Seated at the tea table, Ilia looked at the picture, and it was a pleasure to him to see man's life measured out so accurately and simply. The picture had a calming influence, its bright colours seemed to smile at him, and he was quite sure that real life, as it should be, was represented in this picture ingeniously and in a manner easy to understand in order to show

people what life should be like. He looked at this picture of human life, and thought that now, having obtained what he desired, his life must go on with just such accuracy, as was represented in the picture. It would go upwards, and at the very top, when he had amassed enough money, he would marry an unassuming girl who knew how to read and write.

The samovar hummed dismally and whistled now and then. Through the window-panes and muslin curtain the sky looked dimly in at Ilia, and the stars were scarcely visible. In the twinkling of stars there is always something restless.

"Perhaps it is better to marry at forty," thought Ilia. "Life with a woman is full of trouble, she always brings an unnecessary bustle and lots of nonsense. And I must marry a girl about thirty. But if I marry late I shall die before I have time to put my children firmly on their feet."

The samovar sang still more softly, but somehow more piercingly; a shrill sound which gets on the nerves in an annoying way, like the buzz of a mosquito, disturbing and confusing. But Ilia did not want to put the lid on; when the samovar stopped singing the room became too still. In his new abode Luneff experienced sensations that he had not had before. He had always lived with other people, divided from them only by thin wooden partitions—now he was surrounded by stone walls, behind which he did not feel the nearness of people.

"Why must one die?" Luneff suddenly asked himself, looking at the man descending from the heights of felicity to the grave. And he remembered Jacob Filimonoff, who was constantly thinking of death, and his words: "It's interesting to die."

Ilia pushed these recollections angrily from him and tried to evade them.

"How is Paul getting on with Vera?" rose up another useless question.

An isvoschik passed in the street. The window-panes rattled from the noise of the wheels upon the stone paving, and the lamp on the wall shook. Strange

sounds came from the shop, it was Gavrik muttering in his sleep. The dense darkness in the corner of the room seemed to sway. Ilia sat with his elbows on the table, pressing his temples with the palms of his hands, and examined the picture. At the side of the God of Sabaoth stands a beautiful lion, a tortoise crawled along the ground, a badger is walking along, a frog jumping, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is covered with enormous blood-red flowers. The old man with his feet in the coffin resembled Poluektoff—he is just as bald and lean, and his neck is just as thin. The dull thud of feet resounded in the street; someone passed the shop slowly. The samovar went out, and all was so still in the room that the very air seemed to have materialised and become as substantial as the walls.

Recollections of the merchant did not trouble Ilia, neither did any of his thoughts, as a rule; they just touched his heart softly and carefully, enveloping it as clouds envelop the moon. They made the colours of the picture, "The Steps of a Man's Life," fade a little; a blot seemed to appear on the picture, and the stillness around Ilia seemed to grow fuller. Always after thinking of the murder of Poluektoff, Luneff said to himself with calm unconcern, that there must be justice in life—consequently, sooner or later, man will be punished for his sins; but after thinking in this way, he would look sharply into the dark corner of the room, where it was particularly still, and where the darkness seemed as if it were going to take a definite form. Then Ilia would undress, get into bed and put the lamp out. He would not put it out all at once, but turned the screw which moved the wick up and down. The flame in the lamp first disappeared almost entirely, then appeared again, and the darkness jumped round the bed, darting at it from all sides and then springing back into the corners. Ilia would watch the intangible black waves trying to cover him and amused himself in this way for a long time, trying to pierce the darkness with wide-open eyes, as if he expected to catch hold of something with his gaze.

At last the light would quiver for the last time and disappear, and darkness would fill the whole room for an instant and seemed to be still quivering, not having had time to grow motionless after its struggle with the light; and then before Ilia's eyes the dim bluish blot of the window would appear. If there were a moon, black streaks of shadow fell from the iron bars on to the table and floor. In the room everything became so intensely still that it seemed if anyone were to heave a deep sigh everything would shake. Luneff would wrap himself well in his blankets, covering his neck particularly carefully, and, leaving his face bare, look into the darkness of the room till he fell asleep. He would awake in the morning fresh and calm, and feel almost ashamed of himself when he thought of the foolery of the previous evening. He would drink tea with Gavrik at the counter, and looked at his shop as if it were something quite new to him. Sometimes Paul ran in to see him between work, smeared all over with dirt and fat, in a singed blouse and with a face black with smoke. He was working again at a plumber's, and carried a kettle with tin, leaden pipes and soldering irons. He was always in a hurry to go home, and if Ilia asked him to stop and have a talk, Paul answered, with an uncomfortable smile,—

"I can't! I feel, brother, as if I had a fairy-tale bird at home, and its cage were not strong enough. It sits in it the whole day long all alone, and who can say what it is thinking about? Its life has become dull. I understand that well. If only there were a child."

And Gratchoff sighed deeply. One day he said to his friend gloomily,—

"I've turned the water into my garden, but I'm afraid it will flood it."

Another time when Ilia asked him if he were writing any poetry, Gratchoff said, with a smile,—

"Yes, with my finger upon the sky. Let it go to all the devils! It's not for us to eat cabbage soup with a burst shoe. I've run my entire cargo aground. I haven't the tiniest spark in my head! I think of her

the whole day long. When I'm at work and begin soldering, for instance, dreams about her pour into my head like molten lead. There's rhyme for you—ha, ha! Of course honour to him who's thorough in all things. But then you see—I'm like that—but she's different. M-yes, it's hard for her."

"And for you?" asked Ilia.

"And for me too, for that reason. If only her life were brighter! She's accustomed to a merry life, that's what it is! She's always dreaming of money. 'If,' says she, 'we could get some money from somewhere, everything would change. I'm a fool,' says she, 'I ought to rob some merchant.' So she talks nonsense out of pity for me. I understand that. It's hard for her."

Paul suddenly grew anxious and ran away.

Very often the tattered and half-clad shoemaker came to see Ilia with his inseparable harmonica under his arm. He told Ilia about all that happened in Filimonoff's house and about Jacob. Gaunt, dirty and dishevelled, Perfishka would stand, pressing himself against the door, and, smiling from ear to ear, let drop his quaint sayings,—

"Petruha has married, his wife resembles a beetroot, and his step-son—a carrot! A whole kitchen garden has he, by God! His wife is stout, short, red, and her face has three storeys; she has three chins, and yet only one mouth. Her little eyes are like those of a thoroughbred pig; they are small and can't look upwards. Her son is tall and yellow, and wears spectacles. He's an aristocrat! He's called Savva, he speaks through his nose, and in his mother's presence he's holy enough to look at, but behind her back he's up to all kinds of sin. The whole lot of them are first-rate company! Jacob looks as if he wanted to hide away in some hole like a terrified black-beetle. He drinks, poor fellow, in secret, and coughs with all his might. I expect his father injured his liver right well! They're devouring him. He's a soft lad—they won't choke, never fear, but will gobble him up. Your uncle has written from Kiev. In my opinion he has had all his trouble for nothing.

They won't let the hunchback into heaven, I'm thinking! And Matitsa has quite lost the use of her feet; she has to be wheeled in a chair. She has hired a blind man from the asylum and has harnessed him in her chair and guides him like a horse—it's enough to make you laugh! But she earns her living all the same. She's a good woman! That's to say, if I hadn't had such a wonderful wife I'd certainly marry this same Matitsa! I can say straight: in the whole world there are only two real women—that's to say with a warm heart! my wife and Matitsa. Of course she drinks, but why should not a good person drink? A good person is always a drunkard."

"And Mashutka?" Ilia reminded him.

At the mention of his daughter all the shoemaker's jokes and smiles disappeared as when an autumn wind blows all the dry leaves off a tree. Perfishka's lips quivered, his yellow face grew dismal, and he said in a low, embarrassed voice,—

"I don't know anything about her. Krenoff told me straight: 'don't dare go past even, or else I'll disfigure her.' Ilia Yakovlich! give me something to get a drink."

"You are perishing, Perfili," said Ilia, with regret.

"I'm perishing, quite," agreed the shoemaker, calmly. "Many ought to feel sorry for me when I die!" continued he, with assurance. "For I'm a merry man and love to make people laugh! They all do nothing but wail: oh! and ah! sin and God. While I sing songs to them and laugh. If you sin for a copeck's worth—you'll die, and if you sin for a thousand roubles—you'll die, and the devils will torment you just the same. There must be a joyous man in the world too, there must."

Laughing and joking, with a provoking expression, and looking like an old plucked greenfinch, he would disappear at last, while Ilia, having seen him to the door, smiled and shook his head. He felt sorry for Perfishka, but saw the uselessness of his pity, and besides it troubled him. Luneff had not left the past far behind him, and everything that reminded him of it

aroused a restlessness in him. He was like a man tired out, who is resting, plunged into a sweet slumber, but the autumn flies buzz in a tiresome way around his head and do not give him any peace. When he talked to Paul and listened to Perfishka's tales he smiled with interest, shook his head, but waited impatiently all the time for them to go. Sometimes he felt sad and uncomfortable, listening to Paul; at such moments he would hastily press money upon him, and, shrugging his shoulders, say,—

"In what other way can I help you? I would advise you to break with Vera."

"I can't break with her," Paul said quietly. "One does away with what one does not need. But I need her, and many others need her too. They are tearing her away from me—that's what it is. And perhaps it's not with my soul that I love her, but out of anger and spite. In my life she is the very best, my sole bit of happiness. Must I really give her up? What will be left to me then? I sha'n't let them have her, don't you trouble! I'll kill her, but won't give her away." Gratchoff's hard face grew red and he clenched his fists tightly.

"Do you notice anybody prowling around her?" asked Ilia, thoughtfully.

"That I have not noticed."

"Then about whom did you say: they are tearing her away?"

"There is a power that wants to tear her out of my arms. Oh, devil! My father perished through a woman, and I suppose that's to be my lot too."

"It's impossible to help you," said Luneff, and felt a kind of satisfaction. He was more sorry for Paul than for Perfishka, and when Gratchoff spoke angrily an anger against someone blazed up in Ilia's heart too. But the enemy who was dealing out injuries and spoiling Paul's life was not to be found—he was invisible; and Luneff saw that his anger was just as unnecessary as his pity and all his other kind feelings towards people. All such feelings seemed to him useless and superfluous. While Paul knitted his brows and said gloomily,—

"I know you can't help me. How can you help? Who can help me? We are all alone in the world. Fate has said: work, bear and be silent. Then spue your soul out, and the devil take you!"

And, looking into his friend's face, he continued firmly, with ominous certainty,—

"There, you've crawled into a corner and sit still. But I tell you—somebody does not sleep at nights for turning over in his mind how to cast you out."

"Well, not quite," said Ilia, with a sneer. "I'll stand up for myself! It's not so easy to vanquish me."

"Oh, you, that's enough! Do you think you'll sell all your life?"

"And what else shall I do?"

"You'll be dislodged! Or else you'll throw it up yourself."

"Just catch me throwing it up!" said Ilia, laughing.

But Gratchoff would not give in. He argued with persistence, looking sharply into his friend's face.

"I tell you, you'll throw it up. It's not in your character to sit quietly in a corner your whole life long. And for sure you'll either fall into drink or ruin yourself—something is sure to happen to you."

"But why?" exclaimed Luneff in astonishment.

"It's just that. A peaceful life does not suit you. You're a good lad with a heart. There are such people; they rejoice in good health their whole life long and are never ill, and suddenly down they fall."

"How, 'down they fall'?"

"They fall down dead."

Ilia laughed and stretched himself, straightening out his strong muscles, and heaved a deep sigh.

"It's all bosh!" said he.

But in the evening, as he sat drinking his tea, he involuntarily recalled Gratchoff's words and began thinking of his business relations with Mrs Avtonomoff. Overjoyed by her proposal to open a shop he had consented to all their conditions; and suddenly it became clear to him that, although he had put into the business about four hundred roubles of Poluektoff's money, he was more like a shopman who had to give an account

of everything to Tatiana Vlacieva, than her partner. This discovery astounded and angered him.

"Aha! you kiss me so as to be able to put your hands into my pockets more easily!" said he inwardly to Tatiana Vlacieva. And he decided on the spot to put all the rest of his money into the business, buy out the shop from his mistress and break off the intimacy. This decision was easy to make. Tatiana Vlacieva had seemed superfluous to him before, but lately she had even become a burden to him. He could not get accustomed to her caresses and once said to her straight out,—

"What a shameless creature you are, Tania."

But she only laughed in answer to him.

She kept on telling him of the life of people of her class, and one day Ilia said in perplexity,—

"If all you say is true, Tania, your decent life is not worth a damned farthing!"

"Why? It is merry!" said Mrs Avtonomoff, shrugging her shoulders.

"Oh, very merry, I must say! In the daytime nothing but a struggle for crumbs, and at night—lewdness. No, there's something wrong."

"How innocent you are!" exclaimed Tatiana Vlacieva. "Well, listen."

And she began again to praise this clean, decorous life of the middle classes, and praising it showed him all its cruelty and dirt.

"But is that good?" asked Ilia.

"What a queer fellow! I do not say it is good, but I say that if it were not so life would be dull."

Sometimes she preached to him.

"It is time you gave up wearing those chintz shirts. A decent man ought to wear linen underclothing. Please listen how I pronounce words and remember them. You must not say 'undred, but hundred. And you must not say ar'n't and ain't—those are all peasants' words, while you are no longer a peasant, although you are not polished enough yet."

She kept pointing out to him more and more often the difference between him, a peasant, and herself, an

educated woman, and this gave offence to Ilia. When he lived with Olimpiada he had felt sometimes that the woman was dear to him as a good companion, and sometimes it had seemed to him that he loved her with a calm love. Tatiana Vlacievna never aroused a feeling of companionship towards herself; he saw that she was more interesting than Olimpiada, he observed her with curiosity, but lost all respect for her. When he lived with the Avtonomoffs, he sometimes heard Tatiana Vlacievna praying before going to sleep,—

"Our Father, which art in Heaven," sounded her loud and hurried whisper from behind the partition, "give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses. Kiria, get up and shut the kitchen door; I feel a draught on the floor."

"Why do you kneel on the bare floor?" asked Kirik in a lazy voice.

"Stop, do not disturb me," and again Ilia heard the hurried and preoccupied whisper.

"God, rest the souls of your humble servants. Vlas, Nicolas, Monk Mardari. Eudoxia, Mary; Lord, send good health to Tatiana, Kirik, Seraphine."

The hurry of her prayer did not please Ilia; he saw clearly that she prayed without any desire to do so, and simply from habit.

"Do you believe in God, Tatiana?" asked he one day.

"What a question!" exclaimed she in astonishment. "Of course I believe. Why do you ask?"

"Just so. You try to get done with Him so awful quick," said Ilia, with a smile.

"Firstly, you ought not to say awful quick when you can say 'very quickly'; and secondly, I get so tired after the day's work is done that God cannot do otherwise than forgive me my negligence."

And, lifting her eyes in a dreamy way, she added with certainty,—

"He will forgive all. He is merciful."

But when Olimpiada had prayed, she did so in silence a long time. She went down on her knees before the holy pictures, bent her head and remained

like that motionless, as if she were turned to stone. Her face was full of sadness and severity, and she never answered questions.

Now, when Ilia saw that in the affair of the shop Tatiana Vlacieva had cleverly duped him, he felt something like a repugnance for her. "If she were a stranger to me she might have done so," thought he. "Everybody tries to cheat the other. But she is something like a wife to me; she kisses and caresses me. Vile cat! Only strumpets behave like that, and not all of them."

He became cold and suspicious towards her, and refused to meet her, giving various excuses.

About this time another woman came into his life. She was Gavrik's sister, who came to the shop sometimes to have a look at her brother. She was tall and slight and well-shaped, but not pretty, and although Gavrick told him that she was nineteen, she seemed to Ilia to be much older. Her face was long and yellow and worn; and she had a great many fine wrinkles on her forehead. The wide nostrils of her bird-like nose seemed to be expanded by anger, and the thin lips of her small mouth were always tightly compressed. She spoke distinctly, but as though unwillingly, between her teeth; she moved quickly with her head thrown back, as if she were boasting of her beautiful face; but perhaps it was the thick and long plait of dark hair which drew her head backwards. The big black eyes of this girl had a severe and grave expression, and her whole air conveyed the impression of something straightforward and inflexible. Luneff felt shy in her presence, she seemed haughty to him, and inspired respect. Each time that she appeared in the shop, he politely offered her a chair, saying,—

"Take a seat, please."

"Thank you," answered she, shortly, and, nodding to him, sat down. Luneff stealthily observed her face, which differed so greatly from all the women's faces he had seen so far, her brown dress, which was well worn, her boots with patches and her yellow straw hat. She sat talking to her brother, and the long fingers of her

right hand always rapped out a rapid and noiseless tattoo on her knee, while with the left hand she waved her strap of books in the air. It was strange to Ilia to see this haughty girl dressed so shabbily. Having sat in the shop for a minute or two, she would say to her brother,—

“Well, good-bye. Don’t get into much mischief.”

And nodding silently to the master of the shop, she would go away with the step of a brave soldier going into attack.

“What a stern sister you have!” said Luneff to Gavrik one day.

Gavrik wrinkled his nose and opened his eyes wide, pouted his lips, and his face took a comically impetuous expression that very successfully reminded one of his sister’s face. Then he explained to Ilia, with a smile,—

“That’s what she seems like. But it’s only pretence.”

“But why does she pretend?”

“Oh, she likes to! I can make any face I like too.”

The girl interested Ilia greatly, and he thought of her in the same way that he had thought of Tatiana Vlacieвна. “It would be good to marry such a one. She has a heart for sure.”

One day she brought a thick book and said to her brother,—

“Here, read this, it is very interesting.”

“What is it, may I look?” asked Ilia, politely.

She took the book out of her brother’s hands and gave it to Luneff, saying,—

“*Don Quixote*, the history of a certain brave knight.”

“Ah! I’ve read a great deal about knights,” said Ilia, with a polite smile, looking into her face. She knitted her brows and began to speak hurriedly in a cold voice,—

“You read fairy tales, but this is a good and clever book. A man is described in it who devoted himself to the defence of all those who were miserable and oppressed through man’s injustice; this man was always ready to sacrifice his life for the happiness of others, you understand? The book is written in a humorous

style that was indispensable at the time it was written ; but one must read it seriously and attentively."

"That's how we'll read it," said Ilia.

The girl was speaking to him for the first time, and for that reason he felt an unusual pleasure, and smiled. But she glanced at his face and said coldly,—

"I do not think you will like the book."

And went. It seemed to Ilia that she had pronounced "you" particularly distinctly. This ruffled him, and he said angrily to Gavrik, who was looking at the pictures in the book,—

"Well, this is not the time to read."

"But there are no customers," replied Gavrik, without shutting the book. Ilia looked at him and was silent. In his mind sounded the girl's words about the book ; but of the girl herself he thought with displeasure,—

"What a stuck-up creature."

CHAPTER XXVI

TIME wore on. Ilia stood behind the counter twirling his moustache, and sold his goods, but the days seemed to him to pass very slowly. Sometimes he felt a desire to shut up the shop and go for a walk, but he knew it would affect his business and did not do so. Of an evening it was also inconvenient for him to go away. Gavrik was afraid of remaining alone in the shop, and, besides, it was dangerous to leave the shop in his charge: he might set fire to it by accident, or let some rascal in. Business did not go badly, and Ilia began to think that perhaps a helpmeet would be necessary. His intimacy with Mrs Avtonomoff was growing weaker of its own accord, and Tatiana Vlacieвна did not seem to have anything against this either. She laughed merrily and looked over the day's accounts carefully, and when she sat in Ilia's room, calculating the disks of the counting board, he felt that this woman with her bird-like face was odious to him. But sometimes she appeared before him, merry and lively, joking and flashing her eyes, and called Ilia her partner. Then he was allured again, and what he called a filthy entanglement renewed itself. Sometimes Kirik came in, seated himself negligently in a chair near the counter and chattered and joked with the small dress-makers, if any came for purchases while he was there. He had left off his police uniform, wore a suit of raw silk and boasted of his successful employment at the merchant's.

"My salary is six hundred roubles, and I gain as much, having the most moderate tastes. That is not bad, is it? I make profit cautiously and lawfully—ho, ho! We have changed our lodgings, do you know? Now we have very good ones. We have taken a cook—she

cooks splendidly, the animal. In the autumn we will receive company and play at cards, that is deuced pleasant. The time passes agreeably, and we can win, as there are two of us who play, my wife and I, one of us will always win. And the sum won pays for the reception of your guests—ho, ho! my fine fellow! That's what is called inexpensive and pleasant living." He settled himself still more carelessly on his chair, smoked a cigarette, and, puffing away, continued in a lower voice,—

"I went into the country, not long ago, did you hear about it? And I can tell you the girls there are such—phew! You know, children of nature, so firm one can't pinch into them, the hussies. And all that sort of thing is very cheap, the devil take me. A bottle of liqueur, a pound of gingerbread, and she's yours." Luneff listened to him and was silent. He was somehow sorry for Kirik, without accounting to himself why he was sorry for this stout and simple fellow, and at the same time he nearly always felt a desire to laugh when he saw Avtonomoff. He did not believe Kirik's tales about his village exploits; it seemed to him that Kirik was only boasting and repeating what others said. And when he was in a bad humour he would say to himself as he listened,—

"Struggler for crumbs."

"Y-yes, brother, it is splendid to make love in the bosom of nature, under the shelter of a hut, as they say in books."

"And if Tatiana Vlacievná heard about it?" asked Luneff.

"She would not wish to know about it, brother," answered Kirik, winking his eye slyly. "She knows that she ought not to know about it—ho, ho! A man is like a cock by nature. Well, and you, brother, have you a dame of your heart?"

"I plead guilty," said Ilia, with a smirk.

"A small dressmaker? Yes. A little dark woman."

"No, not a dressmaker."

"A cook then. A cook is also good, she's fat and appetising and warm."

Ilia laughed like one possessed, and his laugh convinced Kirik of the existence of the cook.

"Change them oftener, change them oftener," he advised Ilia in the tone of an experienced man.

"But why do you think she's a cook or a dress-maker? Am I not worthy of somebody better?" asked Ilia, through his laughter.

"They become your position in life better than anyone else. You couldn't have a love affair with some lady or young girl of good society, now could you?"

"Why not?"

"Oh, that is so easy to understand. I do not wish to give offence, but, my dear friend, you must know that you are a common man, a peasant, so to say."

"But—but she is a lady," said Ilia, choking with laughter.

"What a joke!" exclaimed Kirik, and burst out laughing too.

But when Avtonomoff was gone, Luneff felt injured when he thought of his words. It was clear to him that, although Kirik was a kind-hearted and droll fellow, he considered himself an exceptional being, not Ilia's equal, but higher and better, and at the same time he and his wife profited by Ilia a great deal. Perfishka told him that Petruha sneered at his business and called him a rascal, and Jacob told Perfishka that before he, Ilia, was better and more sincere and did not give himself such airs as he did now, and Gavrik's sister also convinced Ilia that he was not her equal. She was a postman's daughter, clothed almost in tatters, but she looked at him as if she were annoyed at his living on the same earth as herself. Since he had opened his shop, Ilia's self-consciousness had grown even more sensitive than before. His interest in this plain but strange girl kept on growing, and he wanted to know from whence came that haughtiness in the poor, ill-clad girl before whom he quailed so. She never spoke to him first, and this stung him to the quick. Her brother served as an errand boy in the shop, and, if only for this reason, she ought to look upon him, the master, more graciously. One day he said to her,—

"I'm reading your book about Don Quixote."

"Well, and do you like it?" asked she, without even looking at him.

"Very much, indeed. It's funny—he was such a queer fellow."

Then she looked at him. It seemed to Ilia that her black, haughty eyes, full of hate, glued themselves to his face.

"I knew you would say something like that," she said slowly and distinctly.

Ilia felt something offensive, reproachful and unfriendly in these words.

"I'm an uneducated man," said he, shrugging his shoulders.

She was silent, as if she had not heard him, and once again a frame of mind that had not invaded him for a long time took possession of him, and he was full of anger against people, and meditated deeply for a long time over injustice, his sin, and what awaited him in the future. This last question troubled him with special persistency. He liked his shop and his mode of life, as a rule, in those days. In comparison with his former life, this life was clean, peaceful and free. But was it possible that he would have to live like this for ever? stick in the shop from morning till night, then sit down to tea in solitude, alone with his thoughts, and go to bed, and then wake up the next morning and go into the shop again. He knew that many tradespeople, in fact, perhaps everyone, lived exactly like that, but probably they were all married and had children, drank vodka, and played at cards, and it was not likely there were men like him amongst them. In his outer and inner life he had many reasons to consider himself an exceptional person, different to other people. Tradespeople did not satisfy him, some were like Kirik, they boasted of everything they did and talked nothing but shop, others cheated openly. One day, thinking it over, he remembered Jacob's words,—

"May God keep you from luck—you are greedy." And these words seemed to him to be deeply offensive. No, he was not greedy, he only wanted to live in clean-

liness and peace, and be respected by others and not to be made to feel at every step that they said,—

“I am higher than you, Ilia Luneff, I am better than you.” And he began meditating on what awaited him in the future. Would he be punished for the murder or not? Sometimes he thought that if a punishment fell upon him for his sin it would be unjust. He had not wished to strangle the merchant, “all had happened of its own accord,” said he to himself for the hundredth time. Many murderers, libertines and robbers lived in the town, and everybody was aware that they were murderers, libertines and robbers by their own free will, and yet they live, enjoy all the pleasures of life, and no punishment overtakes them.

But to be just—every wrong done to a human being ought to be recompensed by the offender. And in the Bible it is said: “He rewardeth him, and he shall know it.” These thoughts re-opened the old wounds in his heart, and he blazed up with a turbulent yearning to revenge his spoiled life. Sometimes the idea struck him of going and doing something desperate, perhaps to set fire to Petruha Filimonoff’s house, and, when it was burning and people running from all sides, to cry out,—

“It was I who set fire to it! It was I who strangled merchant Poluektoff!”

People would seize him and judge him, and send him to Siberia, as they had sent his father. This revolted him and he brought his thirst for revenge down to the desire to tell Kirik of his intimacy with his wife and of going to the old man Krenoff and giving him a beating for tormenting Masha.

Sometimes, lying on his bed in the darkness, he listened to the deep stillness, and it seemed to him that all of a sudden everything would sway and fall and begin eddying round in a wild whirlwind with a noise and a crash. This whirlwind would catch him up like a leaf fallen from a tree, and make him twirl round and round and destroy him, and Luneff shuddered from a foreboding of something unknown.

One evening, when Luneff was just going to close

the shop, Paul appeared, and, without any greeting, said in a calm voice,—

“Vera has run away.”

He sat down on a chair, put his elbows on the counter and whistled softly, looking into the street. His face seemed to be turned to stone, but his small, light-coloured moustache moved like a cat's.

“Alone or with somebody?” asked Ilia.

“I don't know. It's three days since she went.”

Ilia looked at him and was silent. Paul's calm face and voice did not permit him to see how Gratchoff took his mistress's flight; but he felt there was an irrevocable resolution under this calmness.

“What do you think of doing?” asked he in a low voice, seeing that Paul did not intend speaking. Gratchoff stopped whistling and announced shortly, without turning towards his friend,—

“I'll kill her!”

“You're at your old game again,” exclaimed Ilia, waving his hand irritably.

“I've broken my heart over her,” said Paul in a low voice. “Here's a knife.”

He took out of his shirt a small bread knife and flourished it before his face.

“I'll draw it across her throat just once.”

But Ilia caught hold of his hand, tore the knife out of it, and threw it behind the counter, saying angrily,—

“You're like a bull which has armed itself against a fly.”

Paul jumped up from his chair and turned towards him. His eyes flashed angrily, his face was distorted, his whole body quivered; but he dropped on to his chair again and said disdainfully,—

“You're a fool.”

“And you're mighty clever!”

“The power isn't in the knife, but in the hand.”

“Well, go on!”

“And if my hands were to fall off, I'd tear her throat with my teeth.”

“Dear me, how terrible!”

“Don't talk to me, Ilia,” said Paul, calmly, once

more in a low voice. "You can believe me or not, but don't tease me. My fate teases me enough."

"But just think, you queer fellow," said Ilia, softly and persuasively.

"I've been thinking for more than two years. I've thought over everything; however, I'll be off. What's the good of talking to you? You are satisfied, consequently you're no companion for me."

"And you just throw off your madness!" cried Luneff, reproachfully.

"While I am hungry, body and soul."

"I wonder at the way people argue," said Ilia, mockingly, shrugging his shoulders. "A woman is like a beast in man's opinion—she's something like a horse. 'Are you willing to drag me along?' says he. 'Well, take pains and I won't beat you. Ah, you don't want to?' Down comes a blow on her head! But, you devils! a woman is also a human being, and she has a character of her own."

Paul glanced at him and laughed hoarsely.

"And what am I? Am I not a human being too?"

"But ought you to be just or not?"

"Ah, go to all the devils with this same justice of yours!" cried Gratchoff, furiously. "You can be just; it does not stand in the way of a satisfied person. D'you hear? Well, and good-bye."

He went quickly out of the shop, and, passing through the door, took off his hat. Ilia sprang from behind the counter after him, but Gratchoff was already walking down the street with his cap in his hand, waving it excitedly.

"Paul!" cried Luneff. "Stop."

He did not stop, did not even look round, and, turning into a by-alley, disappeared. Ilia slowly went back behind the counter, feeling that his friend's words had made his face burn as if he had looked into a heated stove.

"How vicious he is!" sounded Gavrik's voice.

Ilia smiled.

"Who is he going to kill?" asked Gavrik, coming up to the counter. He held his hands behind his back,

his head was thrown back, and his rugged face was red.

"His wife," said Ilia, looking at the boy.

Gavrik was silent, then, with an effort, announced thoughtfully in a low voice,—

"And a neighbour of ours poisoned her husband with arsenic, about Christmas—a tailor, because he was constantly drunk."

"Such things happen," said Luneff, slowly, thinking of Paul.

"And this one—will he really kill her?"

"Don't bother, Gavrik!"

The boy turned round, went to the door, and on his way to it muttered,—

"But they marry all the same, the devils!"

The evening twilight had already filled the street, and the windows of the house opposite Luneff's shop were lighted up.

"It's time to shut up," said Gavrik in a low voice.

Ilia was looking at the lighted windows. The lower part of them was hidden by flowers and the upper by white blinds. Through the leaves one could see a gold frame on the wall. When the windows were open, sounds of a guitar, singing and loud laughter flowed into the street. In this house nearly every evening they sang and played and laughed. Luneff knew that a member of the court of justice of the district, Gromoff by name, a stout, ruddy man with a big black moustache, lived in the house. His wife was stout too, and fair, with kind blue eyes; in the street she walked with an air of importance, like a queen out of a fairy tale, and when she spoke she smiled. Gromoff had also a sister, a young girl, tall and dark-haired and of a dark complexion; many young officials paid court to her; they met at Gromoff's house nearly every evening and laughed and sang. Gromoff's cook, when buying thread, complained of her masters, saying that they fed the servants badly and kept back their wages. And Luneff thought,—

"There, for instance, people live well."

"Really it's time to shut up," said Gavrik, with persistence.

"Well, then, put the shutters up."

The boy shut the door and it became dark in the shop. Then he drew the iron bolt noisily.

"Like a prison," thought Luneff.

His friend's offensive words about satisfaction had wounded his heart as with a splinter. Sitting at the tea table he thought of Paul with anger, and he did not believe that Gratchoff was capable of stabbing Vera.

"All the same, it was quite unnecessary for me to take her part. Let them all go to the dogs. They don't know how to live themselves and don't let others," thought he, with exasperation.

Gavrik sipped his tea noisily from his saucer and swung his feet under the table.

"Has he killed her yet or not?" suddenly asked he of his master.

Luneff looked at him gloomily and said,—

"Drink your tea, and go to bed."

The samovar hissed and hummed, just as if it were getting ready to jump off the table. Out of the open window of the next house angry cries resounded.

"Nifont, Ni-i-fo-ont!"

Suddenly a dark figure stopped in front of the window and a trembling voice asked,—

"Does Ilia Yakovlich live here?"

"Yes," cried Gavrik, and, jumping up from his chair, sprang to the door so swiftly that Ilia had not time to say a word to him.

"It must be she!" said he in a loud whisper, holding the handle of the door.

"Who?" asked Luneff, also in a half whisper.

"The one that he wanted to kill."

He pushed the door open, and the slight figure of a woman in a chintz dress, with a handkerchief on her head, appeared in it. With one hand she took hold of the frame of the door, while with the other she pulled at the corners of the handkerchief that covered her head. She stood sideways, as if she were ready to go away.

"Come in," said Luneff in a displeased voice, looking at her without recognising her.

Starting at the sound of his voice, she lifted her head, and her pale little face smiled.

"Masha!" cried Ilia, jumping up from his chair.

She laughed softly, and, fastening the hook of the door, stepped towards him.

"You did not recognise me, you did not even recognise me," said she, stopping in the middle of the room.

"Lord Jesus! But how is it possible to recognise you? What do you look like!"

He took her by the hand with exaggerated politeness, led her to the table, bending over her and looking into her eyes, and not able to say what she looked like exactly. She was incredibly thin and walked as if her legs were breaking beneath her weight.

"Where have you come from? Are you tired? Oh, dear, what a girl!" muttered he, putting her carefully into a chair and looking into her face.

"That's how he—" said she, looking into Ilia's eyes, with a smile. His heart contracted painfully within him as he met her glance and smile.

As she sat in the light of the lamp he could see her figure well. She leant against the back of her chair, with her thin arms hanging down, and bent her head on one side, breathing rapidly with her sunken breast. She seemed to be incorporeal, or as if she were made only of bones. Her chintz dress showed the lines of her angular shoulders, elbows and knees, and her thin face was terrible to look at. The bluish skin was tightly drawn on her temples, cheek bones and chin, and for that reason her mouth was half open, for her thin lips could not cover her teeth, and on her small, long face an expression of dull pain and fear was fixed. Her eyes looked dim and dead.

"Have you been ill?" asked Ilia.

"No-o," answered she, slowly. "I'm quite well, it's he who has made me so."

"Your husband?"

"Yes."

Her slow and quiet words sounded like moans, while

her exposed teeth gave her face the expression of something fishlike or dead, as if it were smiling with the smile that one sometimes sees on the face of the dead.

Gavrik stood near Masha, looking at her, with his lips tightly compressed and fear in his eyes.

"Go to bed," said Luneff to him.

The boy went into the shop, moved about for a minute, and then appeared in the door again. Masha sat motionless, only her eyes travelled from object to object, moving in their sockets with difficulty. Luneff poured her out some tea, looked at her and could not find anything to ask his girl friend about.

"Y-yes—he does torture me," said she. Her lips quivered and she closed her eyes for an instant; and when she opened them two big, heavy tears trickled from under her eyelashes.

"Don't cry," said Ilia, turning his head aside. "Better drink some tea, and tell me all, you will feel better."

"I'm afraid he will come," said Masha, shaking her head.

"We'll turn him out," said Ilia.

"He is strong," Masha warned him.

"Have you run away from him?"

"Y-yes, it's the fourth time. When I can't bear it any longer, I run away. The last time I wanted to throw myself into a well, but he caught me, and beat and tortured me."

Her eyes grew large with terror, inspired by her recollections, and her lower jaw trembled; bending her head, she finished in a whisper,—

"He strikes my legs fit to break them."

"Oh!" exclaimed Ilia. "But why don't you do something? Haven't you got a tongue? Give notice to the police—'he tortures me,' say! One is tried for that—and put into prison."

"W-well, but he's the judge himself," said Masha, hopelessly.

"Krenoff? How can he be judge? What are you saying?"

"I know he is! He sat in court for two weeks

running not long ago—kept on judging. He came back hungry and angry. He caught hold of my breast with the tongs and began twisting and twirling it, as if it were a rag—look!”

She undid her dress with trembling fingers and showed Ilia small, flabby breasts, covered with dark spots, which looked as if they had been chewed.

“Do up your dress,” said Ilia, gloomily. It was disagreeable to him to look at the bruised and piteous body, and he could scarcely believe that it was his play-mate, charming little Masha, who sat before him. She uncovered her shoulder, saying in an even voice,—

“Look, how he has bruised my shoulders! And my whole body—he has pinched me black and blue.”

“But what for?” asked Luneff.

“He’s savage—‘you do not love me,’ he says, and pinches me.”

“Perhaps you were no more a girl when you married him?”

“Why-y, how? I lived with you and Yasha, nobody ever touched me. And even now I can’t stand it—it hurts me and is loathsome to me, I always feel sick.”

“Be quiet, Masha,” asked Ilia, softly.

She was silent, sitting on her chair as if she were turned to stone again, with her breast uncovered.

Ilia glanced at her thin, bruised body from behind the samovar, and repeated,—

“Button your dress up.”

“I don’t feel any shame before you,” answered she in a hollow voice, beginning to button her jacket with trembling fingers.

Everything was quiet. Then loud sobs were heard coming from the shop. Ilia got up, went to the door, and shut it, saying gloomily,—

“Stop, Gavrik, go to sleep!”

“Is that the boy?” asked Masha.

“Yes.”

“Is he crying?”

“Yes.”

“Is he afraid?”

“N-no, he’s sorry, I suppose.”

"For whom?"

"For you."

"Oh!" said Masha, indifferently; and her lifeless face remained unmoved. Then she began to drink her tea, her hands trembled, and the saucer knocked against her teeth. Ilia watched her from behind the samovar and did not know if he were sorry for her or not; but it was painful for him to be with her, and he thought of her husband with hatred.

"What are you going to do?" asked he, after a long silence.

"I don't know," answered she, with a sigh. "What can I do? I'll rest, and then they will catch me again."

"You must complain," said Luneff, decidedly. "What does he torment you for? And who has the right to torment a human being?"

"He was the same with his first wife," said Masha. "He tied her to the bedstead by her hair and pinched her just the same. And once I was sleeping, and suddenly something hurt me. I woke up and cried out. And it was he who had lighted a match and put it on my body."

Luneff jumped up from his chair and began speaking loudly and savagely. He said that she ought to go the very next day to the police, show all her bruises, and demand that her husband should be tried.

She listened to his words and began moving uneasily in her chair, looking about her in a frightened way, and said,—

"Don't shout so—don't shout so, please. They will hear you."

His words only frightened her. He soon saw that, and it became obvious to him that the girl, who had been so full of life and so gay only such a short time ago, was now tormented almost to death, and so stupefied by beating that she had lost all human shape.

"Well, all right," said he, sitting down on his chair again. "I'll see to this business myself. I'll find the way! And you, Mashutka, you'll stay here for the night. Do you hear?"

"I hear," answered she in a low voice, looking round the room.

"You'll lie down on my bed, and I'll go into the shop. And to-morrow, I—"

"I would like to lie down now—I'm tired."

He pushed the table away from the bed in silence, and Masha fell on to it; she tried to wrap herself in the blanket, but could not, and, smiling feebly, said,—

"How funny I am, just as if I were tipsy."

Ilia threw the blanket over her, readjusted the pillow under her head, and wanted to go into the shop, but she said anxiously,—

"Don't go away, sit with me a little. I'm afraid of being alone. I seem to see all sorts of things."

He sat down on a chair at her side, and, looking at her pale face, bestrewed with her curls, turned away. Somehow he suddenly felt ashamed, seeing her half dead before him. He remembered Jacob's entreaties, Matitsa's tales about Masha's life, and he hung his head.

"And Yasha gets beaten by his father too, Matitsa told me. What a destiny!" said she.

"Such fathers," said Luneff, through his tightly-clenched teeth, interrupting her low, lifeless discourse, "such fathers ought to be sent to Siberia. Your father and Petruha Filimonoff."

"My father is only weak, he's not to blame for anything."

"If you can't bring up your children, don't give birth to them."

In the house opposite the shop someone was singing a duet, and the words of the song floated into Ilia's room through the open window. A strong and powerful bass was articulating the words with great zeal:—

"It is unknown to a disappointed man."

"Here, I'm falling asleep already," muttered Masha. "How nice it is here, quiet and still—they sing well."

"M-yes, they sing," said Luneff, smiling gloomily. "Some people are flayed alive, while others sing."

"And I cannot give myself up again."

"Once and—" a high note sounded exquisite in the stillness of the night, flying up to the heights lightly and easily.

Luneff got up and shut the window irritably. The song seemed to him to be out of place, it made him annoyed somehow. The noise caused by the window-frame made Masha start. She opened her eyes, and, lifting up her head, said,—

"Who's there?"

"I shut the window."

"Lord Jesus! Are you going away?"

"No, no, never fear."

She moved her head about on the pillow, and fell asleep again. Ilia's least movement, or steps outside in the street, disturbed her, she opened her eyes at once, and cried out in her sleep,—

"At once, oh, at once."

Or else asked Ilia, putting out her hand to him,—

"Is anybody knocking?"

Looking out of the window, which he had opened again, and trying to sit motionless, Luneff was thinking of the best way to help Masha, and decided gloomily not to let her go away from him until the police had interfered in this business.

"I must act through Kirik."

"We entreat you, we entreat you,"

burst forth the loud song from Gromoff's window. Someone was clapping his hands. Masha groaned, while the song went on:—

"A pair of sorrel horses, harnessed at sunrise."

Luneff shook his head almost in despair. These songs and merry cries and laughter disturbed him. With his elbows on the window-sill he looked at the lighted windows opposite with dislike and violent indignation, and said to himself it would be good to go out into the street and launch a stone from the paving at one of the windows. Or, if he had a gun, to fire at those merry people with hail-shot. Hail-shot would reach them. He pictured to himself the frightened faces,

covered with blood, the consternation and cries, and smiled with an angry joy in his heart. But the words of the song sounded in his ears against his will, he repeated them to himself and realised with astonishment that those merry people were singing about the burial of a harlot. This astounded him. He began listening more attentively, and said to himself,—

“What are they singing for? What mirth is there in such a song? What an idea, the fools! To sing about a burial, and of such a person too. While here, only a few feet away from them, a human being is lying beaten almost to death.”

“Bravo! bravo!” resounded in the street.

Luneff smiled, looking first at Masha, then into the street. It seemed strange to him that people could be merry singing a song about the burial of a harlot.

“Vasili, Vasilich!” muttered Masha. “I won’t—Lord!”

She began tossing about on the bed, as if she were being burnt, threw the blanket to the ground, and, throwing out her arms, lay motionless. Her mouth was half open and she lay gasping. Luneff bent over her hastily, afraid that she was dying; but, reassured by her breathing, he covered her with the blanket, and then climbed up on to the window-sill, and, pressing his face against the iron bars, watched Gromoff’s windows. Over there they continued singing—first one voice, then a duet, then in chorus. Music and laughter resounded. Women passed before the windows dressed in white and pink and light blue. Ilia listened to the songs, and wondered, full of perplexity, how they could sing slow, dismal songs about the Volga, burials and untilled fields, and laugh after every song, as if nothing were the matter and it was not they who had been singing. Was it possible they found amusement in distress?

Each time that Masha drew his attention towards herself, he looked at her and wondered what was going to happen to her. If Tatiana were to come in suddenly and see her? What was he to do with Masha? He felt as if he were suffocated by the fumes of charcoal. He was sick of the songs, of Masha’s

groans, and of his own painful and disjointed thoughts. When he grew sleepy he descended from the window-sill and stretched himself on the floor by the side of the bed, with his coat under his head. He dreamt that Masha had died and was lying on the ground in the middle of a large shed, while around her stood ladies in white and pink and light blue, and sang over her, and when they sang sad songs everyone laughed, quite out of harmony with the singing, and when they sang something joyous they all cried bitterly and shook their heads sadly, wiping their eyes with white handkerchiefs. It was dark and damp in the shed, in the corner stood Savel, the smith, and forged an iron grating, knocking loudly with his hammer upon the red-hot bars. Somebody was walking about on the roof of the shed, crying out,—

“Ilia, Ilia!”

While he, Ilia, was lying on the shed too, tightly bound, and was scarcely able to move and could not speak.

“Ilia, get up, please.”

CHAPTER XXVII

HE opened his eyes and recognised Paul Gratchoff, who was sitting on a chair and pushing Ilia's legs with his feet. A bright sunbeam looked into the room, lighting up the samovar, which was boiling on the table. The light blinded Luneff and he screwed up his eyes.

"Listen, Ilia!"

Paul's voice was hoarse, as if after a prolonged state of drunkenness, his face was yellow and his hair dishevelled. Luneff glanced at him and jumped up from the floor, crying out in a low voice,—

"What is it?"

"She's caught!" said Paul, shaking his head.

"What? Where is she?" asked Luneff, bending over him and catching him by the shoulder. Gratchoff staggered and said in a lost way,—

"They've put her into prison—they say she was led off yesterday morning."

"What for?" asked Ilia in a loud whisper.

Masha woke up, and, starting at the sight of Paul, stared at him with frightened eyes. Out of the shop door peeped Gavrik, with his lips screwed up disapprovingly.

"They say she's stolen six hundred roubles from a merchant—his pocket-book—bills of exchange, they say."

Ilia gave his friend a push in the shoulder and left his side abruptly.

"When she was searched they found it," said Paul in a hollow voice. "She gave the assistant of the commissary a blow in the face, they say."

"Oh, of course," said Ilia, with a gloomy smile. "If you're put into prison, you'll be put in with both feet."

Seeing that this did not concern her, Masha smiled and said in a low voice,—

“If only I could be put into prison.”

Paul glanced at her and then at Ilia.

“Don’t you recognise her?” asked Ilia. “Masha, Perfishka’s daughter, don’t you remember?”

“A-ah!” said Paul, slowly and indifferently, and turned away from Masha, who, on recognising him, was smiling at him.

“Ilia!” said Gratchoff, gloomily. “And if she did it for my sake? She used to speak about it.”

“Well, I don’t know for whose sake she did it—for yours or for her own—but it’s all the same now! Her singing days are over.”

Luneff had not had time to come to himself. He had not had enough sleep and sat on the bed at Masha’s feet, unwashed and dishevelled, looking first at her and then at Paul, and feeling quite stupefied.

“I knew,” he said slowly, “that no good would come of the whole business.”

“She would not listen to me,” said Paul in a hollow voice.

“There!” cried Luneff, with a sneer. “Therein lies the whole thing—she did not listen to you! And what could you say to her?”

“I loved her.”

“And what the devil is your love good for? What can you buy with it? You could not earn enough by work to give her enough to eat, let alone anything else.”

“That’s true,” said Paul, with a sigh.

Luneff began to get indignant. These events in Paul’s and Masha’s lives aroused anger in him and revolted him; and, not knowing against what to turn these feelings, he directed them against his friend.

“Everyone wants to live in cleanliness and joy, she too. While you kept on: ‘I love you,’ that means live with me and bear a deficiency in everything. Do you think that’s right?”

“And how ought I to have acted?” asked Paul, meekly, in a low voice.

This question cooled Luneff a bit. He grew thoughtful involuntarily.

"It would have been easier for me to have killed her with my own hand," said Paul.

Gavrik peeped out of the shop?"

"Ilia Yakovlich! shall I open the shop?"

"Let it go to the devil!" cried Luneff, irritably. "What business is possible under the circumstances?"

"Am I in your way?" asked Paul.

He was sitting on a chair, doubled up, with his elbows on his knees and looking at the floor. A vein stood out palpitating on his temple from the blood rushing to his head.

"You?" exclaimed Luneff, looking at him. "You are not in my way. Nor Masha, either; it is something quite different. There's something, as I've told you many times, which stands in the way of all of us—in yours, and in Masha's, everybody's. I don't know if it's our stupidity or not, only there's no possibility of living decently." Luneff looked round his small room; he glanced at Masha, who was lying on the bed motionless, with a despondent face, then into the shop, where Gavrik was drinking his tea, and then out of the grated window into the street, and went on speaking in an irritable, angry and hoarse voice, almost in despair,—

"It's impossible to live. There's not enough space and everything is obscure and incomprehensible. When a man finds himself a clean corner, he has no peace. All is unreal somehow, painful and disagreeable. One does not understand anything. Everything hurts you. You hear people sing—that means, they feel merry. But it's hurtful to listen to their songs when your heart is sore."

"What are you speaking about?" asked Paul, without looking at him.

"About everything!" cried Luneff. "I feel as if nothing were of any damned good whatever. I don't understand anything—perhaps. Well, let it be so: I don't understand. But I know what I want: I want to live decently, in cleanliness, honesty and joy! I

don't want to see any grief or ugliness, sins or any sort of vileness. I don't want to! I myself—"

He stopped and grew pale.

"Well?" asked Paul.

"No, that's not it. I didn't do it on purpose," continued Luneff, lowering his voice.

"You keep speaking of yourself," observed Paul.

"And about whom do you speak, I should like to know?" said Luneff, with a sneer. "About her? And to whom is she necessary—to you or to me? Everybody suffers from his own sores, and groans for his own self. I'm not speaking of myself, but about everyone, for everyone troubles me."

"I'll go away," said Gratchoff, and rose slowly from his chair.

"Oh, dear!" cried Ilia. "Try to understand and don't take offence. I'm wronged too! People who are wronged ought to understand each other, then it would become clear who the offender is."

"I feel, brother, as if I had received a blow on the head, I don't understand anything! I'm sorry for Vera, and there all ends for me. What am I to do? I don't know."

"You can't do anything," said Ilia, decidedly. "Consider her as lost. She'll be condemned, she was seized with the stolen object."

Gratchoff sat down on his chair again.

"And if I say that she did it for me?" asked he.

"Are you a prince? Just you say that, and you'll be thrust into prison too. But you ought to trim yourself up. You had better wash yourself. And you too, Masha—we'll go into the shop while you get up and put yourself straight; make us some tea. Behave as if you were at home."

Masha started, and, lifting her head from the pillow, asked Ilia,—

"And must I go home?"

"You needn't. A man's home is where he is not tormented at least. Come along, Pashka."

When they entered the shop, Paul asked gloomily,—

"Why is she with you? She's only half alive."

Luneff told him in a few words all about it.

To his astonishment, Masha's story seemed to cheer Gratchoff up.

"The old devil!" swore he at the shopman, and even smiled.

Ilia stood by his side, and, looking round the shop, said,—

"Pillage, robbery, theft, drink, all sorts of vileness and disorder—our lives consist of nothing but that! One does not want anything of the sort—it's all the same! you must float down the river with everyone else and you're wetted by the same water. You must live as it is ordained for everyone. There's nowhere to hide, not in a forest nor a monastery. You once told me not long ago that my business would not satisfy me."

He waved his hand round the shop, and nodded his head, with a disagreeable smile.

"It's true it does not satisfy me. What do I gain by standing on one spot and selling? I have much worry and have lost my freedom. It's impossible for me to go out. Formerly I walked about the streets wherever I liked. I used to find a cosy corner and sit down and admire the surroundings. While now I have to stick here day after day and nothing more."

"If you could take Vera as a shopwoman?" said Paul.

Ilia glanced at him, and was silent.

"Come in!" Masha called out to them.

At tea none of them scarcely spoke. Outside in the street, the sun shone brightly, the bare feet of children pattered on the pavement, sellers of vegetables passed the window.

"Onion, green onion!" cried a woman, loudly. "Fresh cucumbers!"

It was a reminder of the spring, of nice, warm and bright days, while the crowded room smelt of damp; sometimes a low, despondent word sounded, and the samovar reflected the sun and sang.

"We seem as if we were at a commemoration of the dead," said Ilia.

"Of Vera," added Gratchoff.

He looked quite crushed. His hands moved languidly, his face was despondent, and he spoke slowly in a hollow voice.

"Pull yourself together," said Ilia to him, drily. "What's the good of letting yourself go so?"

"My conscience torments me," said Gratchoff, shaking his head. "I sit here and say to myself: 'suppose it was I who drove her into prison?'"

"And very probably that's just it," confirmed Ilia, pitilessly.

Gratchoff lifted his head and looked at his friend reproachfully.

"What are you looking at?"

"You're full of anger."

"And why should I be kind-hearted? And why, in the name of goodness, must I be gentle?" cried Ilia. "Who ever did me a kindness? Who ever patted me on the head? There was perhaps one human being who loved me—and that was nothing—a harlot! Ah! everybody can beat us, but we must remain meek? Not I, thank you kindly!"

A burning irritation seized him, and his face grew red, his eyes became bloodshot, he jumped up from his chair in a fit of rage, seized by the desire to cry out, swear and beat the table and walls with his fists.

He frightened Masha, and she began to cry loudly and piteously, like a child.

"I'll go home, let me go," she said through her tears in a trembling voice, and bobbed her head as if she wanted to hide it somewhere.

Luneff was silent. He saw that Paul, too, was looking at him with anger.

"Well, what's the good of crying?" said he, angrily. "I did not shout at you. And there's nowhere to go to. I must go. I must. And Paul will remain with you. Gavriilo! if Tatiana Vlacieвна comes—who's there now?"

Someone knocked at the door from outside. Gavrik looked questioningly at his master.

"Open the door," said Ilia.

On the threshold appeared Gavrik's sister. For several seconds she stood motionless and upright, with her head thrown back, and looked at them all with screwed-up eyes. Then an expression of repugnance appeared on her plain, cold face and, without returning Ilia's bow, she said to her brother,—

"Gavrik, come out to me for a minute."

Ilia's anger blazed up. The slight made the blood rush to his head with such force that his eyes began to water.

"Young lady, when people bow to you, return the greeting," said he, impressively and discreetly.

She lifted her head still higher, and knitted her brows. With tightly-compressed lips she looked Ilia up and down and did not say a word. Gavrik looked at his master angrily too.

"It is neither to rascals nor drunkards that you have come," continued Luneff, quivering with the strain. "You are treated with respect, and as an educated young lady you ought to respond with the same."

"Don't ride the high horse, Sonka," said Gavrik, suddenly, in a conciliatory tone, and, going up to her side, took hold of her hand.

There was an awkward silence. Ilia and the girl looked at each other defiantly, and waited. Masha went quietly to a corner. Paul blinked his eyes.

"Well, say something, Sonka," said Gavrik, impatiently. "Do you think they want to insult you?" asked he. And, smiling suddenly, added,—

"They're a rum lot!"

His sister pulled him by the sleeve, and asked Luneff drily and sharply,—

"What do you want of me?"

"Nothing, only—"

But suddenly a bright idea entered his head. He made a step towards the girl, and said, as politely as he could,—

"May I ask you? That's to say, you see, there are three of us, we are ignorant people, while you have received an education."

He was in a hurry to set forth his idea and could not. He quailed before the straightforward and severe look of her black eyes; they rested motionless on him, and seemed to push him away. The girl's nostrils quivered, and her fingers squeezed her brother's hand nervously. Ilia dropped his eyes, and muttered irritably in confusion,—

"I don't know how to say it all at once. If you have time, come in and sit down."

And stepped backwards to let her pass.

"Stop here, Gavrik," said the girl, and, leaving her brother at the door, went into the room. Luneff pushed a stool towards her. She sat down. Paul went into the shop, Masha cowered in a corner near the stove, while Luneff stood motionless at two paces from the girl, and could not bring himself to open the conversation.

"Well?" said she.

"The—thing is this," began Ilia, sighing heavily.

"You see—a girl—that's to say, she isn't a girl, but married to an old man. He torments her—covered with bruises and pinched all over, she ran away, and came to me. Perhaps you think badly? There's nothing."

He found his words with difficulty and he spoke falteringly, divided between his desire to relate Masha's story and to put his own thoughts about the subject before the girl. Especially he wanted to tell the girl his own thoughts. She looked at him and her face grew softer, although her eyes flashed strangely.

"I understand," interrupted she. "You don't know what to do? First of all, you must go to a doctor—let him examine her. I know a doctor—if you like, I'll take her to him? Gavrik, see what time it is? Eleven? All right, that is his hour for receiving patients. Gavrik, call an *isvoschik*. And you—introduce me to her."

But Ilia did not stir. He had not expected that this grave, severe-looking girl could speak with such a soft voice. Her face also astounded him, as a rule haughty, it was now only full of anxiety, and, although her nostrils expanded more than ever, there was a good,

simple and sincere expression on her face which Ilia had not seen before.

But she had turned away from him, went up to Masha and began speaking to her in a low voice.

"Don't cry, darling, do not be afraid. The doctor is a good man—he will examine you and give you a paper, that is all! I will bring you back here. Well, dear, don't cry."

She put her hands on Masha's shoulders and wanted to draw her to herself.

"Oh, it hurts," moaned Masha, quietly.

"What have you there?"

Luneff listened and kept on smiling.

"That—devil!" exclaimed the girl, revolted, and left Masha's side. Her face was pale with horror, and indignation flashed in her eyes.

"How she is bruised—oh!"

"That's how we live!" exclaimed Luneff, blazing up again. "You saw? I can show you something else, just as bad. Let me introduce you to my friend, Paul Savelievich Gratchoff."

Paul came slowly out of the shop and put out his hand to the girl, without looking at her.

"Medvedeff, Sofia Nicolaevna," said she, observing Paul's despondent face. "And you are called Ilia Yakovlich, are you not?" said she, turning to Luneff.

"Exactly so," confirmed Ilia, briskly, squeezing her hand hard, and, without letting go of it, continued,—

"Listen—if you're like that—that's to say, if you have taken upon yourself one thing, don't disdain another. There's a loop here too."

She looked gravely and attentively at his handsome and excited face, trying quietly to loosen her hand from his. He told her all about Vera and Paul, and spoke warmly and with passion, feeling that he was lightening his heart of a great burden. He gave her hand a good shake and said,—

"He used to write poetry, and what poetry too! But this business has taken entire possession of him, and of her too. Do you think that if she is like that, there's nothing more in her? No, don't think so. A

man never shows all the good or the bad that is in him."

"How?" asked the girl.

"That's to say, if a man is bad there is also good in him, and if there is good—there is bad too. Our souls are all many-coloured—everybody's is."

"That's quite true," said the scholar, approvingly, and nodded her head thoughtfully. "That is very human. But, please, let go of my hand—it hurts."

Ilia began to apologise; but she did not listen to him and talked to Paul convincingly.

"For shame, Gratchoff! one ought not to behave like that. One must act. One must always act: either defend oneself or attack. You must try and find somebody to defend her, a lawyer, do you understand? I will find you one, do you hear? And nothing will happen to her. I give my word of honour—she will be acquitted."

Her face was red, the hair on her temples was dishevelled, and her eyes flashed with a strange joy. Masha stood at her side and looked at her with the confidence and curiosity of a child, while Luneff looked at Masha and Paul with triumph and importance, feeling proud of the girl's presence in his room.

"If you can really help me," said Paul in a broken voice, "do so. I'll never forget it. Although I don't believe any good will come of it, still, I would like to believe it."

"Come to me at seven o'clock—all right, eh? Gavrik, here, will tell you where I live."

"I'll come. I can't find words to thank you."

"Why thank me?"

"But I feel."

"Listen, let us drop that. People ought to help each other."

"Just wait for them to!" cried Ilia, with irony.

The girl turned towards him quickly; but Gavrik, who felt himself the only sedate and sensible person in all this stir, pulled his sister's hand and said,—

"Go, you chatterbox."

"Yes, Masha, dress."

"I haven't anything to put on," answered Masha, timidly.

"Ah, well, all right. Let us go. You will come, Gratchoff, yes? Good-bye, Ilia Yakovlich."

The two friends shook her hand respectfully and silently, and she went, leading Masha by the hand. But in the door she turned round again, and, throwing her head back, said to Ilia,—

"I forgot, and it is very important! I did not say good-morning to you when I entered. That was a mean action, and I beg your pardon. Do you hear?"

Her face was suffused with a blush and she dropped her eyes in confusion. Ilia looked at her, and something seemed to be singing in his heart.

"I am very sorry indeed! I thought you were merry-making—it was stupid of me, but—"

She stopped, as if she had swallowed some word.

"And when you reproached me for not bowing to you, I thought it was the host who was speaking, and was mistaken! I am very glad, it was a feeling of dignity that made you speak so."

Her face suddenly lighted up with a kind, radiant smile, and she said heartily, as if she were relishing the words,—

"Ah, how good it is when one meets a man who has a feeling of dignity! I am very glad, very, everything happened so awfully well! Awfully well!"

And she disappeared like a small grey thunder-cloud, lighted up by the rays of the rising sun. The friends looked after her. Both their faces looked solemn, but a bit comical. Then Luneff looked round the room, and, giving his friend a poke, said,—

"Stunning, eh?"

The other laughed softly.

"W-well, she's a figure!" continued Luneff, sighing with relief. "How she—eh?"

"Swept everything away like the wind!"

"There, did you see?" said Ilia, triumphantly, drawing his hand through his curly hair.

"How she apologised, eh? That is a real, educated

person, who respects everyone, but will never bow first! Do you understand?"

"A good person," confirmed Gratchoff, smiling. "How long did she stop here? Almost an hour, but it passed like a minute."

"She flashed and was gone, like a star—ha-ha!"

"M-yes, and saw at once what ought to be done for each of us."

Luneff laughed excitedly. He was glad that this haughty girl had turned out to be so simple and brisk, and was pleased with himself for behaving with dignity towards her.

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed he, with regret. "I forgot, she flurried me so with her apologies!"

"What did you forget?" asked Paul.

"I ought to have kissed her hand. In their class, the educated class, it is done as a sign of particular respect."

Gavrik was moving around them and felt dull.

"Well, Gavrik!" said Ilia, catching him by the shoulder, "your sister is a brick!"

"Yes, she's pretty fair!" confirmed the boy, condescendingly. "Shall we open the shop to-day? Or else it might be a holiday. I'd go for a walk in the fields!"

"No business to-day! Paul, let's go for a walk too!"

"I shall go to the police-office," said Gratchoff, knitting his brows again. "Perhaps they will let me see her."

"And I shall go for a walk."

CHAPTER XXVIII

FULL of joy and courage, Ilia walked down the street, thinking of the girl and comparing her to the others that he had met up to now. It was clear to him that she was the best and had been the kindest of all to him. In his memory echoed her words of apology; he pictured to himself her face, with expanded nostrils, that expressed in every feature an inflexible aspiration after something.

"But how she took me up short in the beginning?" recalled he, with a smile, and fell into deep meditation as to why, not knowing him and not having said one word to him unreservedly, she had been so haughty and angry towards him?

Around him was the turmoil of life. Schoolboys walked along laughing loudly, carts with goods passed, droskies rolled by, a beggar hobbled along in front of him, tapping the flagstones noisily with his wooden leg. Two convicts, under the escort of a bodyguard, carried something in a bucket on a pole. A seller of pears rode by, crying out loudly,—

"Garden, sweet stewed pears!"

And behind the seller of pears a small dog followed lazily, with its tongue hanging out of its mouth. Rumbling, crashes, shouts, trampling of feet, all melted together into a lively stimulating bustle. A warm dust hovered in the air and tickled his nostrils. In the clear blue sky the sun shone radiantly, suffusing the street with a hot glow. Luneff looked at it all with a feeling of pleasure that he had not experienced for a long time. Everything in the street seemed to be unusual and interesting. A pretty girl with a lively pink face hurried along, with an almost imperceptible skip, and looked at Ilia brightly and kindly, as if she wanted to say to him,—

"What a capital fellow you are."

Luneff smiled at her.

An isvoschik lifted his hat, and, bending down from his box, was saying with a grin to a stout lady, who stood on the pavement,—

“It’s too little, ma’am, add five copecks more.”

And Ilia knew by his eyes that he was lying, the rascal, and that the lady had given him his right fare. A shop boy was running along with a copper tea-can in his hand, letting all the cold tea run out and splashing the feet of the passers-by, while the lid of the tea-can rumbled merrily. It was hot and close and noisy in the street, and the dense foliage of the old lime trees in the town cemetery enticed one into the shade and quiet. Surrounded by a white stone wall, the luxurious vegetation in the old cemetery rose in a mighty wave to the sky, and at the top was crowned by a green lace-work of leaves that resembled foam. There, high up each leaf was cut out sharply against the blue sky, and, quivering softly, seemed to melt; and above the foam the golden crosses of the church shone brightly, surrounded by the reflected rays, seeming as if brought to life by their palpitantion.

Entering the cemetery, Luneff went slowly up the broad avenue, breathing in the fragrant smell of the blossoming lime trees. Monuments of marble and granite, clumsy, heavy and covered with mould, stood between the trees, in the shadow of their branches. Here and there, in the mysterious half light, gilded crosses and inscriptions, half effaced by time, shone dimly. Honeysuckle, acacias, white thorn and elder trees grew in the enclosures, hiding the graves with their branches. Here and there one caught a glimpse of a grey wooden cross amidst the dense waves of foliage; thin branches encircled it on all sides and it was almost lost amidst them. The white trunks of young birch trees, resembling velvet, shimmered through the network of dense foliage; sweet and modest, they seemed to be hiding in the shade on purpose to be seen better. The green mounds behind the palings of the enclosures were covered with bright flowers; a wasp buzzed in the stillness, two butterflies gambolled in the air, and

moths noiselessly hovered about. From under the earth grass and bushes vigorously forced their way to the light, hiding the sad graves; all the vegetation of the cemetery was full of a tense impulse to grow, expand, to suck in light and air, and to transform the moisture of the rich earth into colour, scent and beauty, to caress the heart and eyes. Life conquers everywhere and life will conquer all. It was a pleasure to Luneff to walk in the stillness and to draw in with deep breaths the sweet perfume of flowers and lime tree blossoms. Within him all was quiet and peaceful too, his soul rested and he did not think of anything, experiencing the bliss of solitude, unknown to him for a long time. He turned from the avenue to the left into a narrow path and followed it, reading the inscriptions on the crosses and monuments. The palings of the graves surrounded him closely on all sides; they were rich palings, made of cast and hammered iron of studied elegance.

"Under this cross reposes the dust of God's humble servant, Bonifanti,"

read he, and smiled; the name seemed funny to him. Over Bonifanti's dust an enormous stone of grey granite was placed. And next to him in another enclosure reposed Peter Babushkin, twenty-eight years of age.

"A young man," mused Ilia.

On a plain white marble column he read:—

"By one sweet flower the earth has grown poorer,
The heavens are richer—by one star."

Luneff mused over this distich, there was something touching in it. But, suddenly, something seemed to stab him to the heart; he staggered and shut his eyes tightly, but even with his eyes shut he still saw plainly the inscription that had so startled him. Bright golden letters on an enormous brown monument seemed to have cut into his brain:—

"Here lies the body of Vasili Gavrilovich Poluektoff, a merchant of the second guild."

But in a few seconds he felt frightened of his fear, and, opening his eyes quickly, began peering suspiciously into the bushes around him. There was no one to be seen, only somewhere a long way off a requiem was being sung. The thin tenor of a priest sounded in the stillness :—

“Let u-us pra-a-y.”

A deep voice, which sounded as if it were displeased with something, answered,—

“Have mercy upon us!”

And the almost imperceptible tinkle of the censer reached him.

Leaning his back against the trunk of a maple tree, Luneff stood with his head thrown back and looked at the grave of the man whom he had murdered. His cap was pressed by the back of his head against the tree, and was raised in front, leaving his forehead bare. His brows were knitted, his upper lip quivered, showing his teeth. He had thrust his hands deep into the pockets of his jacket, and his feet were planted firmly on the ground.

Poluektoff's monument represented a tomb, on the lid of which an open book, a skull and two cross-bones were cut out in the stone. Next to him, in the same enclosure, was another tombstone, but smaller; the inscription said that here lay the body of God's humble servant, Euprakcia Poluektoff, twenty-two years of age.

“His first wife,” mused Luneff. This thought occupied only the tiny particle of his brain which was not taken up with the tense work of his memory. He was overwhelmed by remembrances of Poluektoff; his first meeting with him, how he strangled him, and how the old man wetted his hands with his saliva. In recalling all this Luneff felt neither fear nor repentance; he looked at the tombstone with hatred and with pain, and with a feeling of injury in his heart; and silently, full of hot indignation and with a firm belief in the justice of his words, he said inwardly to the merchant,—

“I have spoiled my life through you, may you be damned! you old demon! How will I live now?”

through your fault. I have soiled myself through you for ever."

"Through you," rapped within him like a hammer. He felt a desire to cry out those two words with all his might, so that everyone should hear, and he could scarcely keep back this mad desire. Clenching his teeth till they ached, he kept looking, and thoughts about his life spread through his soul like fire. Poluek-toff's small, vicious face rose up before him, and somehow Stroganoff's bald head, with its red eyebrows, Petruha's self-conceited snout, stupid Kirik, grey-haired Krenoff, with his snub nose and little eyes—a whole series of faces he knew stood up before him at Poluek-toff's side. A din rang in his ears, and it seemed to him that all these people were surrounding him, pressing upon him and clambering straight at him.

He pushed himself away from the tree, and his cap fell off. Bending down to pick it up, he could not take his eyes off the monument of the money-changer and the receiver of stolen goods. He felt oppressed by the heat and unwell, his face was flushed and his eyes ached from the strain. With a great effort at last he tore them away from the stone, went close up to the enclosure, caught hold of the bars, and, quivering with hatred, spat upon the grave; and as he went away from it he stamped hard upon the earth, as if he wanted to hurt it.

He did not want to go home, his heart was heavy within him and a helpless cold weariness oppressed him. He went on slowly, not looking at anyone, taking no interest in anything and thinking of nothing. He went down one street, turned the corner mechanically, went on a little further, noticed that he was not far from Petruha Filimonoff's eating-house and suddenly remembered Jacob. And when he came to the gates of Petruha's house, he deemed it necessary to go in, although he had not the least wish to do so. Going up the steps of the back entrance, he heard Perfishka's voice,—

"Oh, dear me! kind people, spare your hands, don't break my ribs."

Luneff stopped in the open door, and saw Jacob behind the counter through a cloud of dust and tobacco smoke. With his hair brushed smoothly and wearing an overcoat with short sleeves, Jacob was bustling about, putting tea into teapots, counting the pieces of sugar, pouring out vodka and opening and shutting the drawer of the counter noisily. Waiters ran up to him, and, throwing down marks, cried out,—

“A half bottle! A couple of beer! A ten copecks' worth of roast meat!”

“He's got into the way of it!” mused Luneff, with irritation, seeing his friend's red hands moving swiftly in the air.

“Well, I'll make him remember that fifty-copeck piece!” someone cried out, loudly and savagely.

“Hullo!” exclaimed Jacob, joyfully, when Luneff came up to the counter, but the same instant looked round anxiously at the door which was at the back of him. His forehead was damp with perspiration, his cheeks were yellow and two red spots burnt on them. He caught hold of Ilia's hand and began shaking it, giving a dry cough.

“How do you do?” asked Luneff, forcing himself to smile.

“As you can see. I sell.”

“They've harnessed you in?”

“What's to be done?”

Jacob's shoulders drooped and he seemed to have grown smaller.

“We haven't seen each other for a long time,” said he, looking into Ilia's face with sad and kind eyes. “It would be nice to have a talk—my father, by the way, isn't at home. Listen! Go in there, and I will ask my stepmother to stand behind the counter.”

He opened the door into his father's room and called out in a respectful voice,—

“Mother! come here, please, for a minute.”

Ilia went into the room that had been his and his uncle's, and looked round attentively. Everything was the same, except the wall-paper, which had grown blacker, and instead of two beds there was

only one, with a shelf of books fixed above it. Where Ilia had slept stood a high, clumsy box.

"Well, I'm free for about an hour!" announced Jacob, joyfully, entering and fastening the door with the hook. Would you like some tea? All right. Iva-an—tea!" he called out, and a fit of coughing seized him. He coughed for some time, resting his hand against the wall with his head bent down, and stooping as if he were trying to throw something from out of his chest.

"Well, you do bark with a will!" said Luneff.

"I'm falling away. I'm glad to see you again. So that's what you're like now—clean and important-looking. Well, how are you getting on?"

"What's there to tell about me?" answered Luneff, after a moment's hesitation. "I'm alive, but how are you getting on, that's more interesting?" Luneff felt no desire to speak of himself nor even any wish to talk at all. He looked at Jacob, and, seeing him so meagre, was sorry for his friend; but it was a cold-hearted sorrow—a senseless and empty feeling.

"I, brother, bear my life more or less," said Jacob in a low voice.

"Your father has drawn all the life blood out of you."

"But he has fallen into such clutches himself now."

"It serves him right!"

"Now, all the power is in my stepmother's hands. Her will is law."

"What need have you of money?
Caress me gratis, honey!"

Perfishka was declaiming to an accompanient of his harmonica.

"What is that box?" asked Ilia.

"That? That's a harmonium. My father bought it for me for twenty-five roubles. 'There,' said he, 'learn to play it, and then I'll buy you a good one,' says he, 'for about 300 roubles, we'll put it into the eating-house and you'll play to the public. Otherwise,' says

he, 'one gets no good out of you.' That was a clever device, in every eating-house there is an organ, while we have none, and I like playing on it."

"What a scoundrel he is!" said Luneff, with a smile.

"No, why? Let him. It's true that I am of no use."

Ilia looked steadily at his friend and said savagely,—

"Just give him the following advice: 'when I am dying, dear father, drag me into the eating-house, and charge five copecks a head to look at me dying.' There, then he will get some good out of you."

Jacob laughed uncomfortably and again began coughing, catching hold of his chest and throat. Meanwhile Perfishka was telling about somebody in a lively way:—

"He prayed and fasted with a will,
Of victuals never had his fill,
It put his bowels in a spleen,
But of course it kept them clean."

"Heigho! there's sanctity for you!" and his sonorous harmonica drowned the merry words of the song with provoking trills.

"How do you get on with your half-brother?" asked Ilia, when Jacob had stopped coughing. The latter lifted his face, which was blue from the effort of coughing, and said chokingly,—

"He does not live with us, his principles don't allow him to. It's an eating-house, they say. He's not bad, only very important-looking, and carries himself like a nobleman. Nevertheless, he comes to his mother mostly for money—he's in need of money very much."

Jacob lowered his voice and said sadly,—

"Do you remember that book? Yes? He took it away from me. 'It's a rare book,' said he, 'and is worth a great deal of money.' He took it away. I begged him to leave it to me, but no, he would not."

Ilia burst into a loud laugh. Then the friends began drinking tea. The wall-paper was torn, and through the cracks in the partition the sounds and

smells of the eating-house poured freely into the room, a ringing and excited voice resounded, drowning everything else,—

"Mitr Nicolaevich! don't put a scoundrel's construction on my honest words!"

"I am reading a story, brother," Jacob was saying. "It is called *Julia, or the Dungeons of Madsini*. It is very interesting; and how are you getting on with your reading?"

"I spit upon your dungeon, and yet I live not much above earth myself," said Luneff in a surly tone.

Jacob looked at him with compunction and asked,—

"Is there something wrong with you too?"

Luneff did not answer. He was thinking if he ought to tell Jacob about Masha or not. But Jacob began speaking in a gentle voice,—

"Ilia, you keep bristling and are full of rancour. Well, that is quite useless in my opinion. Because, you see, people—nobody is to blame for anything. Things are ordained, people do not make them. They were arranged in the beginning, and cannot be changed."

Luneff drank his tea and was silent.

"And, 'I will give unto every one of you according to your works,' is quite true. For instance, my father. One can say straight out that he is a tormentor of people's lives. But Thekla Timofeevna turned up, and down he goes under her heel. Now his life is hard enough, he has begun to drink for very grief, and it is not so long ago that they were married. And every man has to expect such a Thekla Timofeevna in the future for his bad actions."

Ilia grew tired of listening, he moved his cup impatiently on to the tray, and suddenly, quite unexpectedly even to himself, asked,—

"What are you expecting now?"

"That's to say, from where?" said Jacob, quietly, with his eyes wide open.

"Well, from—in the future—what do you expect?" Ilia repeated his question sharply and sternly.

Jacob bent his head in silence and grew thoughtful.

"Well?" asked Ilia in a low voice, experiencing a

feeling of burning anxiety and a desire to leave the eating-house.

"What have I to expect?" began Jacob in a low voice, without looking at him. "I have nothing to expect. I am dying, that's all. And that I shall die soon is quite true."

He threw back his head and continued with a quiet, contented smile on his worn face,—

"I see blue dreams. You understand, as if everything were light blue. Not only the sky, but the earth and trees, and flowers, and grass, and all! And everything is so quiet and still! Everything is so motionless—it seems as if there is nothing before you, and everything is blue. One feels so light, one seems to be walking a long distance, without end, without getting tired. And it's impossible to understand if you exist or not? You're so light. One sees blue dreams when one is going to die."

"Good-bye!" said Luneff, getting up from his chair.

"Where are you off to? Stay a little longer!"

"No, good-bye!"

Jacob rose too.

"Well, good-bye, then!"

Luneff shook his hot hand and stared into his face in silence, not knowing what to say to his friend at the last.

"Why are you looking so?" asked Jacob, with a smile.

"Forgive me, brother," said Luneff, with difficulty dropping his eyes.

"What for?"

"Simply so—forgive me."

"But am I a clergyman?" laughed Jacob, softly.

"Here, wait a bit. I forgot to tell you about Mashutka."

"What?"

"They say her life is hard too."

"Yes, I've heard so also."

"Apparently the fate of all of us is the same. Yours is, I know—it's hard, eh?"

He spoke with a faint smile; and the sound of his

voice and his words seemed to be bloodless and colourless. Luneff opened his hand, and Jacob's fell helplessly.

"Well, Yasha, forgive me."

"God will forgive you! Come again?"

Ilia went without answering him.

In the street he instantly felt relieved and more at his ease. It was obvious that Jacob would die soon, and this thought aroused in him a feeling of irritation against someone. He was not sorry for Jacob, for he could not imagine how this straightforward, quiet lad could have lived amongst men. He had looked upon his friend as one doomed to disappear from life long ago. But one thought revolted him: why was such an inoffensive man so tormented and driven to death's door before his time? And at this thought the rancour against life, that was now the core of his soul, kept on growing and gathering strength within him.

He could not sleep that night. In spite of the open window the room was close. He went out into the yard and lay down on the ground under an elm tree, near the wall. Lying on his back, he looked up into the clear sky, and the more fixedly he looked the more stars he saw. The milky way, like a silver tissue, stretched across the sky from end to end—and to look at it through the branches of the tree was both pleasant and sad. Why is the sky, where no one lives, adorned with stars, which sparkle and shine, while the earth, what is it adorned with? Ilia screwed up his eyes and the branches seemed to rise higher and higher. On the blue velvety background of the sky, which was dotted with stars, the black patterns of the leaves looked like hands stretched out towards the sky in the attempt to reach its heights. Ilia remembered his friend's blue dreams, and Jacob's figure rose up before him, blue too, light and transparent, with bright, kind eyes like the stars. Here was a man tormented to death for living peacefully. While the tormentors live as they like and will go on living for a long time to come.

CHAPTER XXIX

JUST at this time something new, but disquieting, came into Ilia's life. Gavrik's sister began coming to his shop almost every day. She was always preoccupied, said good-morning to Ilia, giving his hand a good shake, and, having exchanged a few words with him, disappeared, always leaving something new in his thoughts. One day she asked him,—

"Do you like your trade?"

"Not very much," answered Luneff, shrugging his shoulders, "but still one must earn one's living in one way or another."

She looked at his face attentively with her grave eyes, and her face seemed to become still more intelligent.

"One must live," repeated Ilia, with a sigh.

"Have you never tried to live by labour?" asked the girl.

Ilia did not understand her question.

"What did you say?"

"Have you ever worked?"

"Always. My whole life long. Now, I sell," answered Luneff, perplexed.

But she smiled, and in her smile there was something which stung him.

"Do you think that trade is labour? Do you think it is all the same?" asked she, hastily.

"What else? I get tired over it too."

Glancing at her face, Luneff saw that she was speaking seriously and not joking.

"Oh, no!" continued the girl, smiling condescendingly. "When a man makes something, expending his strength on it, when he makes tape, ribbon, chairs, cupboards—that is called labour, do you understand?"

Luneff nodded his head in silence and blushed : he was ashamed to own that he did not understand.

"But what labour is there in trade? It does not give anything to people!" said the girl, with conviction, observing Ilia's face searchingly.

"Of course," began he, slowly and cautiously, "that's true. Trade is not hard, for one who is accustomed to it. But trade gives something too; if it gave no profits, what would be the good of trade?"

She was silent, and, turning away from him, began speaking to her brother, and soon went away, saying good-bye to Ilia only by a nod. Her face was the same as before the affair with Masha—cold and haughty. Ilia began wondering if he had given offence by any careless word. He recalled all that he had said to her and saw nothing offensive. Then he began thinking over her words, and the more he thought of them the more they interested him. What difference did she see between trade and labour? She interested him more and more, but he could not understand why, being so kind, and not only feeling sorry for people, but knowing how to come to their aid, she had such an angry, provoking face. Paul used to go to her house, and spoke with rapture of her and the ways of her home.

"When you go there, at once it's: 'Ah, good-morning.' If they are at dinner—'Sit down and have some dinner'; if they are at tea—you must drink tea with them! Everything is so simple. There are always lots of people! It is merry. They sing and shout and argue about books. Books are heaped about everywhere, like in a shop. It's crowded, and everybody hustles each other and laughs. The people there are all educated; one is a lawyer, another will soon be a doctor, then there are schoolboys and different people like that. You quite forget who you are, and laugh, and smoke, and all, together with them. They're good people! Merry, but earnest."

"She won't invite me, never fear," said Ilia, gloomily. "She's proud."

"She?" exclaimed Paul. "I tell you—she's as

simple as can be! Don't wait to be asked, but go straight. You'll come and that's all! It's just the same as an eating-house there, by God! Everybody is at his ease. I tell you—what am I to them? But after the second time I felt quite at home there. It's interesting! Full of noise and hubbub—words just fly about. They seem to play through life."

"Well, and how is Mashutka?" asked Ilia.

"Pretty fair, she's coming to herself a bit. She sits and smiles now. She is treated by a doctor, and milk is given her. Krenoff will catch it. The lawyer says they'll give it strong to the old devil. Masha was taken to the coroner. They are seeing to my affair, too, and have taken steps to have the trial sooner. No, it's good there! The lodgings are small, and the people are crammed in, like wood in a stove, and are all ablaze."

"And she herself?" questioned Luneff.

Paul spoke of her in the same way as he used to speak of the convicts, who had taught him to read and write in his childhood. He was strung to the utmost pitch and spoke impressively, intermingling his words with ejaculations.

"She's a stunner, brother! In spite of her being still a schoolgirl—she orders everybody about, and the moment anybody says something that is not to her taste—she flares up—fr-r-r! like a cat."

"I know that," said Ilia, with a smile.

He felt envious of Paul: he wanted to go and see the haughty schoolgirl very much, but his vanity would not allow him to. Standing behind the counter, he thought,—

"There are lots of people in this world, and everyone tries to get something out of everyone else. But what profit has she in taking Mashutka and Vera under her care? She is poor, I expect every morsel is counted in their house. That means she is very kind. But she talks to me like that. In what am I worse than Paul?" These thoughts took such a hold on him that he became almost indifferent to everything else. In the darkness which enveloped his life a crack seemed to have opened, and through it he felt, rather than saw,

something with which he had not come in contact before shimmering in the distance.

"My friend," said Tatiana Vlacievná to him, drily and impressively, "you ought to buy some more narrow braid. The guipure lace is also almost quite finished. There are not enough black reels, number fifty, either. A firm offered me nacre buttons—a commission agent came to me to-day. I sent him on here. Did he come?"

"No," answered Ilia, shortly. This woman had become loathsome to him. He suspected that Tatiana Vlacievná had taken Korsakoff, who had recently been promoted to the grade of commissary of police, as her lover. She gave him appointments less often, although she continued to behave to him just as graciously and playfully as before. Luneff tried to evade these rare meetings under various pretexts, and seeing that she was not angry with him, he swore at her to himself,—

"Dissolute creature—vermin."

She was especially odious to him when she came to the shop to verify the goods. Twirling about the shop like a top, she jumped upon the counter, got down cardboard boxes from the upper shelves, sneezed from the dust, shook her head and pestered Gavrik.

"A shop boy ought to be dexterous and obliging. He is not paid for sitting at the door the whole day long and picking his nose; and when the mistress speaks to him, he ought to listen attentively and not scowl."

But Gavrik had a character of his own. He listened to the mistress's twitter and remained quite indifferent; only when she climbed up to get down things from the top shelves, and lifted her skirts too high, Gavrik glanced at his master mischievously. He spoke to her roughly without any marks of respect for her as mistress; and when she went, he remarked to the master,—

"She's gone, the little wretch."

"You must not speak of your mistress like that," Ilia tried to instil into him, keeping back a smile with difficulty.

"What mistress is she?" Gavrik protested. "She comes, rattles away and then rushes off. You are the master."

"And she too," replied Ilia, weakly, for he liked the steady and straightforward boy.

"And she's a little wretch, all the same," Gavrik persisted.

"You do not teach the boy manners," said Mrs Avtonomoff to Ilia, "and, as a rule, I must say that lately there seems to be no enthusiasm nor love for the business." Luneff was silent, and, hating her with all his soul, said inwardly,—

"If only you would sprain your ankle, you anathema! jumping about here."

He received a letter from his uncle and learned that Terence had not only been to Kiev, but at St Sergius too, had nearly started for Solovki, but found himself at Valaam instead, and would be home soon.

"That will be another pleasure," thought Ilia, irritably. "For sure he will want to live with me."

And he began thinking of the best way to get his uncle to live separately; but he was not able to fix his thoughts on this for long, for customers appeared, and while he was occupied with them, Gavrik's sister came in. She was tired and out of breath, and after greeting him, asked, nodding at the door of the room,—

"Is there any water in there?"

"I'll bring you some in a minute," said Ilia.

"I will get some myself."

She went into the room, and remained there until Luneff had finished serving his customers and came in. He found her standing before "The Steps of a Man's Life." Turning her head towards Ilia, the girl indicated the picture with her eyes and said,—

"How trivial."

Luneff was disconcerted by her remark, and smiled, feeling guilty.

"Brr-r! How commonplace," said she, with disgust, and before he had time to ask any explanation, she was gone.

In a few days she brought her brother his linen and

reprimanded him for being careless with his clothes—tearing and soiling them.

"Well, well," said Gavrik, rebelliously, "there you go. The mistress is always snapping at me, and now you are going to begin."

"Does he get into much mischief?" asked the schoolgirl of Ilia.

"N-no, not more than he can," answered Luneff, affably.

"I am quite meek," said the boy.

"His tongue is a bit long," said Ilia.

"Do you hear?" said his sister, frowning.

"Yes, I hear," responded the other, angrily.

"It's nothing," said Ilia, condescendingly. "A man who knows how to show his teeth has an advantage over others. Some are silent when they're beaten, and then they are beaten to death."

The schoolgirl listened to his words and something like pleasure appeared on her face. Ilia noticed this.

"I wanted to ask you something," said he in confusion.

"What?"

The girl went up close to him, looking straight into his eyes. He could not stand her gaze, and, bending his head, continued,—

"I understand you do not like tradesmen?"

"Not much."

"Why?"

"They live by other people's labour," explained the girl, distinctly.

Ilia threw his head up and raised his brows. These words not only astonished him, but made him angry, and she had uttered them so simply and distinctly.

"That is not true," said Luneff, loudly, after a pause. Her face quivered and grew red.

"How much does that ribbon cost you?" asked she, drily and sternly.

"Ribbon? this one? Seventeen copecks an archin."

"For how much do you sell it?"

"Twenty copecks."

"There you are. The three copecks that you take

do not belong to you, but to the man who made the ribbon. Do you understand?"

"No," owned Luneff.

A hostile look flashed in the girl's eyes. He saw it clearly and quailed before her, but the same instant grew angry with himself for his timidity.

"Yes, I suppose it is not easy for you to understand such a simple thing," said she, stepping back from the counter towards the door. "Picture to yourself that you are the workman and that you make all these things."

She waved her hand round the shop and continued telling him how labour enriches everyone except the person who performs the labour. At first she spoke as usual, drily and distinctly, and her plain face was expressionless; but soon she knitted her brows, frowned, her nostrils expanded, and, throwing her head back, she threw at Ilia, point blank, powerful words, full of youthful, inflexible confidence.

"The tradesman stands between the worker and buyer, he does not do any labour, but raises the price of the object—trade is a lawful robbery."

Ilia felt insulted, but could not find any words in answer to this impertinent girl, who said straight to his face that he did nothing and was a thief. He clenched his teeth listening to her, and did not believe in her words, could not believe in them. And while searching for a word that would upset her whole theory and bring her to silence—he admired her daring, and the insulting words which astonished him aroused in him the uncomfortable question—"Why?"

"All that is not so!" he interrupted her at last in a loud voice, for he felt that he could not listen to her words in silence any longer. "No, I do not agree!" A stormy irritation was rising in his breast and his face grew red and white.

"Refute it!" said the girl, calmly, sitting down on a stool, and, throwing her long plait over her shoulder on to her knees, began playing with it.

Luneff kept turning his head, so as not to meet her hostile glance.

"And I will refute it—by my whole life! Perhaps I have sinned deeply before I attained this."

"All the worse for you. But that is not a refutation," said the girl, and Ilia felt as if she had splashed cold water into his face. He rested his hands against the counter, bent down as if he were going to jump over it, and—angry with her and astonished at her coolness—looked at her for several seconds in silence, shaking his curly head. Her cool gaze and quiet confident face restrained his wrath and disconcerted him. He felt something firm and fearless in her; and the words necessary to refute her found no way to his tongue.

"Well?" asked she, challenging him coolly. Then she smiled and said triumphantly,—

"You cannot refute me, because I spoke the truth."

"Can't I?" asked Luneff in a hollow voice.

"No, you cannot! What can you say?"

She smiled again condescendingly.

"Good-bye," and went with her head held higher than usual.

"It's all bosh! It is not true!" cried Luneff, after her; but she did not look back at his cry. Ilia dropped on to a stool. Gavrik, who was standing in the door, watched him, and was, apparently, very pleased with his sister's behaviour, for his face had a self-confident and victorious expression.

"What are you looking at?" cried Luneff, angrily, feeling that the boy's gaze was disagreeable to him.

"Nothing!" answered the boy.

"That's better!" said Luneff, threateningly, and after a pause added,—

"You can go for a walk!"

He wanted to be alone; but even then he could not collect his thoughts. He did not inquire into the meaning of what the girl had said to him, but only felt that her words were insulting. Leaning his elbow against the counter, he thought,—

"What did she abuse me for? What have I done to her? Yet she's kind. She came, condemned me and went, without any justice, not having asked any-

thing. The educated creature. Well, just come again, I'll answer you."

He threatened her, but looked for the fault about which she had insulted him within himself. He remembered how Paul spoke of her wit and simplicity.

"She doesn't touch Pashka, you bet;" and, lifting his head, he saw himself in the glass. He looked closely at his reflection and seemed to be asking it a question. His black moustache moved on his upper lip, his black eyes looked tired, and two red spots burned on his cheek bones; but his face even now—troubled and slightly morose from the insult—was nevertheless handsome with a coarse, peasant-like beauty, and was better than Paul Gratchoff's sickly, yellow, lean face.

"Is it possible that she prefers Pashka to me?" thought he. And instantly answered himself,—

"And what does my face matter to her? I'm no suitor. She'll marry some doctor, or lawyer, or official. Of what interest can the likes of me be to her?"

He smiled bitterly and again began asking himself,—

"But why did she invite Pashka? Why does she insult me with her words? A tradesman the same as a thief? He does not work, indeed? I live by the labour of others! But who sticks here from morning till night, I should like to know?"

He now began to refute her, and found many words that justified his life; but she was not there, and these words only irritated him, and did not efface the feeling of insult that flamed in his heart. He got up and went into the room, drank a glass of water and looked round. It was gloomy and close in this small, low room with the iron grating over the window. The bright blot of the picture caught his eye. Standing in the door, he stared at "The Steps of a Man's Life," that were measured out so accurately, and thought,—

"That's a lie. Do people live like that?"

He looked at the picture for a long time, inwardly applying the measure which was drawn with such vivid colours to his own life.

"Is that so?" he kept on saying to himself; and suddenly added hopelessly,—

"And if it is so—it's weary work all the same. It's clean, but not joyous."

Going slowly up to the wall, he tore down the picture and carried it into the shop. There he spread it out on the counter and again began examining the changes in man's life that were painted on it, and this time he looked with a sneer. He looked and kept thinking of Gavrik's sister.

"It's as if she knew that I strangled the old man. She cannot like me if she said all that."

Thoughts revolved in his head slowly and heavily, and the picture made his sight grow dim; he crumpled it up and threw it down on the counter, but it rolled down to his feet. Irritated by this, he lifted it up again, crumpled it up tighter, and flung it out of the door into the street.

The street was full of noise. On the opposite side someone was walking along the pavement with a stick. The stick tapped the flagstones between his footsteps, and it seemed as if he had three feet. Pigeons cooed; somewhere in the distance there was a rumble of iron—probably a chimney-sweeper was walking upon a roof. An *isvoschik* passed the shop; the cabman was dozing and his head wagged; everything swayed around Ilia. He took up the counting-board, looked at it and marked twenty copecks. He looked again, and took away seventeen. There remained three copecks. He drew his nail across the disks, they spun round on the wire with a soft sound, and, disuniting, stopped.

Ilia sighed, pushed the counting-board away, leant his chest against the counter and remained motionless, listening to the beatings of his heart.

The next day Gavrik's sister came again. She was the same as usual; in the same old dress, with the same expression.

"There you are," muttered Luneff, angrily, looking at her from out of the room. He bent his head unwillingly in answer to the girl's greeting; but she suddenly smiled kindly, and asked gently,—

"Why are you so pale? Are you not well?"

"I'm quite well," answered Ilia, shortly, trying not to show the feeling which was aroused in him by her attention; it was a good and joyous one; the girl's smile and words had touched his heart softly and warmly, but he decided to pretend that he was offended, inwardly hoping that she would say another kind word and smile again. He made his decision, and waited, pouting and not looking at her.

"You seem to be offended with me?" sounded her voice firmly. The tone was so different to that of her first words that Ilia looked uneasily up at her; she was now the same as usual, haughty and with an arrogant and provoking expression in her dark eyes.

"I'm used to insults," said Luneff, and gave her a challenging smile straight in the face, but feeling at the same time a cold disappointment.

"Ah! you are playing," thought he. "You first give a pat and then a blow! Well, that won't do."

"I did not want to insult you."

The word "you" she pronounced particularly loudly in a patronising way, as it seemed to Ilia.

"It's rather difficult for you to insult me," said he, loudly and impertinently. "I know your worth: you're not a high-flown bird!"

She drew herself up at the words with her eyes wide open from astonishment; but Ilia saw nothing; a wild desire to pay her out laid hold of him like fire, and with intentional slowness he flung heavy, coarse words at her.

"These pretensions of gentility and haughtiness don't cost you much, anyone can acquire them in the gymnasium. And if it were not for the gymnasium, you would be a dressmaker or housemaid, you could not be anything else because of your poverty—is not that the truth?"

"What are you saying?" exclaimed she in a low voice.

Ilia looked at her face and saw with pleasure her nostrils expanding and her cheeks flushing.

"I'm saying what I think. And I'm of the

opinion that all your cheap pretensions are not worth a brass farthing !”

“I have no pretensions !” cried the girl in a ringing voice. Her brother ran up to her, caught her by the hand, and, looking at his master with angry eyes, cried out,—

“Let’s go away, Sonka !”

Luneff cast a look at them and said coldly, full of hate,—

“Yes, you can go. I don’t need you, nor you me.”

They both flashed strangely before his eyes, and disappeared. He laughed after them. Then, remaining alone in the shop, he stood motionless for several minutes, drinking in the sweetness of successful revenge. The girl’s indignant, perplexed and slightly frightened face was stamped deep in his memory, and he was satisfied with himself.

“What a boy,” whirled in his brain disjointedly ; Gavrik’s behaviour disturbed him slightly and spoiled his frame of mind.

“There’s haughtiness for you,” thought he, smiling inwardly. “If Tanka were to come I’d give it her too.”

He felt a desire to push everyone away from him, to push them roughly, and insultingly, and felt himself capable of doing it.

But Tanichka did not come ; he remained alone the whole day, and that day seemed to him to be strangely long. Going to bed, he felt lonely and more wronged by this solitude than by the girl’s words. He thought of Olimpiada, and said to himself that, of all people, this woman had been the best to him. With closed eyes he listened to the stillness of the night, and waited for sounds, and when a sound reached him he started, and, lifting his head fearfully from the pillow, looked into the darkness with wide-open eyes. Not till the morning could he go to sleep ; he was oppressed by a feeling of expectancy, and of being locked up in a cellar, choking for want of air, and other worrying disconnected sensations. He got up with a headache, intended putting the samovar to boil, but did not, and, having drunk a can of water, opened the shop.

About midday Paul came in, angry and scowling. Without saying good-morning to his friend, he asked straight out,—

“What do you mean by forgetting yourself like that?”

Ilia understood what he was alluding to, and, shaking his head hopelessly, remained silent, saying to himself,—

“This one is against me too.”

“What did you insult Sofia Nicolaevna for?” questioned Paul, sternly, standing before him. In Gratchoff’s sullen face and his reproachful eyes Ilia read his condemnation, but cared little. Slowly, and in a tired voice, he said,—

“You ought to say good-morning first, at least, and take off your cap, there’s a holy picture here.”

But Paul seized his cap by the brim, put it on more firmly, and, screwing up his lips provokingly, began to speak hastily and excitedly in a trembling voice,—

“Go on giving yourself airs. You’ve grown rich, you’ve eaten your fill. Just remember how you said: ‘there is nobody for us!’ And when somebody turns up, you drive her away. Oh, you tradesman.”

A feeling of utter indifference prevented Ilia from answering his friend. He looked at Paul’s excited and mocking face coolly, and felt that his reproaches did not make any impression on him. The yellow hair of Gratchoff’s moustache and beard looked like mould on his thin face, and Luneff looked at him, saying to himself indifferently,—

“He’s abusing me. That means she has complained to him. But did I insult her very much? I could have said worse.”

“She understands everything and can explain everything, and you behaved to her like that—oh!” said Paul, mingling his sentences as usual with ejaculations. “They are all good people, clever, they know all the laws by heart—yes! You ought to have kept hold of her, but you—”

“Stop, Pashka,” said Luneff, slowly. “What are you teaching me for? I do as I like.”

"What are you doing? Raising brawls."

"I live as I like. I'm weary of you all. You come and talk."

And, leaning heavily against the shelves, Luneff said thoughtfully, as if he were asking himself,—

"And what can you say?"

"She can, everything," exclaimed Paul, with firm conviction, and even lifted his hand as if he were going to take an oath. "They know everything."

"Well, go to them, then," advised Ilia, indifferently. Paul's words and excitement were disagreeable to him, and he felt no inclination to answer him. A weariness that seemed heavy and immovable clogged his impulses and hindered him from speaking and thinking. He wanted to be alone, to hear nothing and see nothing.

"I will go," said Paul, threateningly. "I will go because I see it is only near them that life is possible, near them one finds everything that one needs, yes! They know the truth. Never have I lived as I live now, decently. Who ever respected me before?"

"Don't shout," said Ilia in a low, feeble voice.

"You blockhead!" cried Paul.

Just at that moment a girl came into the shop and asked for a dozen shirt buttons. Ilia gave what she required without haste, took the twenty-copeck coin from her, rubbed it between his fingers, and, giving it back to her, said,—

"I have no change, bring it another time."

There was change in the desk, but the key was in the room, and Luneff did not want to fetch it. After the girl had gone Paul did not renew the conversation. Standing behind the counter, he clapped his knee with his cap, which he had taken off his head, and looked at his friend as if he were waiting. But Luneff had turned away from him and was whistling softly through his set teeth. The rumble of carts and the sound of hurrying footsteps came in from the street, and the dust flew in.

"Well?" asked Paul, defiantly.

"Nothing," answered Luneff, after a pause.

"Nothing at all."

"Leave me in peace, for Christ's sake!" exclaimed Luneff, impatiently.

Gratchoff thrust his cap on without saying a word, and went out quickly. Ilia looked after him, moving his eyes slowly and not turning his head.

"Is it that I don't feel well, then?" he asked himself.

A big brown dog looked in at the door, wagged its tail and disappeared, then a beggar woman, with grey hair and a big nose, appeared in the door. She bowed and said in a low voice,—

"Give me alms, little father, benefactor!"

Luneff refused her with a silent shake of his head. In the street the noise of a work day throbbed in the hot air. It seemed as if an enormous stove were being heated, and the wood devoured by the fire crackled and breathed out a hot flame. Iron rumbled—dray carts were passing by, the long strips of iron hanging down from the carts touched the stones of the paving, and emitted piercing sounds, as if in pain, and roared and rumbled. A grinder was sharpening a knife, and the angry, hissing sound cut through the air.

"Cherries from Vladimir," cried a hawker in a harmonious voice.

Every minute brings forth something new and unexpected, and life strikes the air by the variety of its sounds, its untiring movement and its eternal creative power; but in Luneff's soul all was still and dead: everything seemed to have stopped within him, there were neither thoughts, nor desires, but only a great weariness. In this state of mind he passed the whole day and the night, full of nightmares, and many following nights and days. People came and bought what they needed, and went away, while he looked after them with the dismal thought,—

"They have no need of me, nor I of them. It's only like this at first, afterwards I'll get accustomed to it. I will live alone, I will."

Instead of Gavrik, the landlord's cook, a surly, thin woman, with a red face, put the samovar to boil and brought him his dinner. Her eyes were colourless and

expressionless. Sometimes after glancing at her, Luneff felt an indignation in the depths of his soul.

"Is it possible that I shall never see anything good in my whole life?"

And he said to himself gloomily and hopelessly,—

"My life is passing at random."

He had grown accustomed to heterogeneous impressions, and, although they agitated and angered him, he felt that it was better to live with them than without them. People brought them; but now his friends had disappeared, and only buyers were left. The sensation of loneliness, and yearning after a good life, was soon drowned by his indifference to everything, and the days passed slowly, full of a kind of oppression.

CHAPTER XXX

ONE evening, after having shut his shop, Ilia went out into the yard, lay down under an elm tree and heard a noise at the other side of the wall. Someone was making a noise with her tongue and saying in a low voice,—

“Oh, oh, oh, my doggie. My dear little doggie.”

Through a chink between the palings Ilia saw a tall, grey-haired woman with a long face. She was sitting on a bench, and a big yellow dog, with his paws on her knees and his nose lifted high in the air, was trying to lick her face. The woman turned her head away, and smiled, stroking the dog.

“They caress a dog, that means they have nobody else to caress,” thought Ilia. With a deep pain in his heart he remembered Gavrik and his sister, then Pashka and Masha.

“When they had need of me they came. The devil take you all! I will go to Jacob to-morrow.”

“My fine doggie!” mumbled the woman behind the wall.

“If Tanka would only come!” said Ilia to himself, dismally; but Tatiana Vlacieвна was staying in the country a long way from the town. He was not able to go and see Jacob, however, for Uncle Terence arrived. He arrived in the morning. Ilia was just awake and was sitting on his bed thinking that here was another day come which it was necessary to get through.

“One lives as if one were going through a swamp in autumn. It’s cold and clammy, one gets very tired but progresses slowly.”

Someone in the yard rapped at the door in short, repeated knocks.

Ilia got up thinking it was the cock who had come

to fetch the samovar, opened the door and found himself face to face with his uncle.

"Oh, oh!" said Terence, shaking his head and smiling mockingly, "it will soon be nine o'clock and your shop is not open yet, you tradesman!"

Ilia stood in front of him, hindering him from entering, and smiled too. Terence's face was sunburnt, but seemed somehow to have grown younger, his eyes were joyous and bright. Bags and bundles lay at his feet, and he, standing amongst them, looked like a bundle himself.

"How do you do, nephew? Let me enter your den, then!"

Ilia stepped aside and began bringing in the bundles in silence, while Terence looked round for the holy picture with his eyes, crossed himself, and, bowing, said,—

"The Lord be praised, here I am home again! Well, good-morning, Ilia!"

When Luneff embraced his uncle, he felt that the hunchback's body was firm and strong.

"I would like to wash myself," said Terence, loudly, looking round the room. He did not stoop, as before; travelling about with his bundle at his back seemed to have pulled his hump down lower—and Terence had grown straighter and carried his head thrown back.

"How are you getting on?" he asked his nephew, throwing handfuls of water into his face.

Ilia felt pleasure in seeing his uncle so changed. He busied himself at the table preparing tea, and answered the hunchback's questions willingly, though with reserve and caution.

"And how are you?"

"I'm all right." Terence shut his eyes and shook his head with a contented smile. "My pilgrimage was so successful—could not have been better. In a word—I have drunk of the spring of life."

He sat down to the table, twisted his beard round his finger, and, bending his head on one side, began telling,—

"I have been to Athanasius the Sitter, and to the thaumaturgists of Pereyaslavl, and to St Metrophanes

of Voronej, and to St Tihon of Sadon. I went to the Isle of Valaam. I have been over lots of ground, I have prayed to many saints, and the last were, St Peter, Febronius of Murom."

Apparently he experienced great pleasure in enumerating all the saints and towns, his face wore an expression of sweet contentment, his eyes grew moist and pride shone in them. He told his tale in the sing-song voice in which all skilful narrators relate their tales about the lives of saints.

It began to rain. At first the drops fell on the window-panes carefully, without hurry, then they came pattering down repeatedly and hastily, and the panes shook under them.

"In the caves of the Holy Monastery there reigns an eternal stillness and the darkness fills one with awe, but it is pierced by little image lamps, which shine in the darkness like the eyes of a child, and it smells of holy oil," Terence was saying in a monotonous voice, while the rain came down faster. Outside, the wind moaned and howled, the iron on the roofs rumbled and the water ran down them with a sobbing sound, while in the air a net of thick steel threads seemed to be trembling.

"The heads of saints shed holy oil."

"So," drawled Ilia, slowly. "Well, and have you relieved yourself of your burden?"

Terence was silent for a minute, then straightened himself in his chair, and, bending down to Ilia and lowering his voice, said,—

"I'll tell you by a comparison. My involuntary sin pressed upon my heart, like a boot that is too small squeezes your foot. It was involuntary, because if I had not obeyed Petruha, he would have driven me away! He would have flung me out of the door, is that not true?"

"Quite true!" agreed Ilia.

"There, but when I started on my journey my soul grew light; I went along saying, 'Lord, do you see me? I am going to Your saints, I know I have sinned.'"

"That means you have settled your accounts?" asked Luneff, with a smile.

"That's according to His will. How He looked upon my prayer, I don't know," said the hunchback, lifting his eyes upwards.

"But how is your conscience?"

"What do you mean by 'how'?"

"Is it still?"

Terence was silent, as if he were listening, and said,—

"It is silent."

Luneff smiled mockingly.

"If your prayer comes from your heart, it will always bring you relief," said the hunchback in a low and impressive voice.

Ilia got up from his chair and went up to the window. Broad streams of muddy water were running by the side of the pavement; in the road, between the stones, were small puddles; the rain fell into them and made them quiver, and the whole street seemed to tremble. The house opposite Ilia's shop stood frowning and was quite wet, its window-panes were dim and one could not see the flowers through them. The street was still and empty, and only the noise of the rain and the murmur of the streams was to be heard. A solitary pigeon sat on the casement of the window protected by the cornice, and the whole street was full of a damp, heavy dreariness. "Autumn is beginning," darted through Ilia's head.

"By what else can a man justify himself if not by prayer?" said Terence, untying one of his bags.

"That's too simple," remarked Ilia, gloomily, without turning towards his uncle. "You sin, pray, and are clean again! That means you can begin to sin again."

"Why? you can live rigidly."

"What for in the name of goodness?"

"What for?"

"Yes."

"How about a clean conscience?"

"What's the good of it?"

"W-well," drawled Terence, disapprovingly. "How you do speak."

"I say what I mean," continued Ilia, firmly and with insistence, standing with his back towards his uncle.

"It's sinful!"

"Well, and let it be."

"You'll be punished!"

"No."

He turned from the window and looked at Terence's face. The hunchback was looking at his nephew's strong figure. Smacking his lips, he searched long for a word to refute his nephew, and having found it, said impressively,—

"How no? You will be! There — I sinned and was punished."

"How?" asked Ilia in a surly tone.

"By terror! I lived in constant fear that suddenly it would be known."

"And I have sinned and am not afraid," said Ilia, with an audacious smile.

"You're fooling," said Terence, severely.

"Yes, I am not afraid. But life is hard."

"A-ah!" exclaimed Terence, triumphantly, getting up from the floor. "It's hard, you say?"

"Yes. Everyone has deserted me, as if I were scabby."

"Therein lies your punishment. Alia!"

"What for?" cried Ilia, almost with frenzy. His jaw trembled and his hands, which he held behind his back, scratched at the walls. Terence watched him with fear, waving a string in the air.

"Don't shout, don't shout!" said he in a low voice.

But Ilia went on shouting. He had not talked to anyone for a long time, and now he cast out of his soul all that had accumulated there during his days of solitude. He said to his uncle, with passion and anger,—

"Your pilgrimage was quite unnecessary, nothing would have happened to you. One can rob and kill too; nothing happens. There is no one to punish you, only those who don't know how to do the job are punished, and those who know how to can do everything they like—everything!"

"Ilia!" said Terence, approaching him cautiously. "Stop a bit, don't get so hot over it. Sit down. Let's discuss it quietly."

Suddenly something fell heavily with a great noise, rolled, crackled and stopped quite close to the door. They both started and grew silent. But it soon became still again, only the rain continued to pour down in torrents.

"What is the matter?" asked the hunchback, softly and fearfully.

Ilia went silently up to the door, opened it and looked out into the yard. A low whistle, a gasp and a whisper, a whole gamut of sounds, melting together into one monotonous heavy groan, floated into the room.

"The cases have tumbled down," said Luneff, shutting the door and going to his old place near the window.

Terence sat down again on the floor and began unpacking his bags. After a silence, he said,—

"No, just think. Crying out such words, brother! Dear, oh, dear! You won't make God wrathful by you godlessness, but only ruin your soul. Understand that—those are wise words. I heard them from a man during my travels. Dear! what a lot of wisdom I have heard."

He again began telling of his travels, looking sideways at Ilia. Ilia listened to his tale just as he listened to the noise of the rain, and thought how he would live with his uncle.

Their life together did not go badly. Terence made himself a bed out of old cases, put it between the stove and the door, in the corner, where at night the obscurity was denser than in the other parts of the room. Getting an insight into Luneff's life, he took upon himself Gavrik's duties; he put the samovar to boil, swept the shop and the room, went to the eating-house for their dinner and was always humming acathistuses to himself. In the evenings he told his nephew how Hallelujah's wife saved Christ from His enemies by throwing her child into a burning stove and taking Christ in her arms in its place. He told

how a monk listened to the song of a bird for three hundred years; about St Kirik and St Ulita, and about many other things. Luneff listened to him, occupied with his own thoughts. Now in the evenings he could go for a walk and he always felt a longing to go out of the town. Out there at night, in the fields, it was quiet, dark and desolate, just as it was in his soul.

"A week after his return, Terence went to see Petruha Filimonoff, and came back angry and crest-fallen. But when Ilia asked him what was the matter, he answered hastily,—

"Nothing—nothing! There—I went and saw them all. We talked, of course—m-yes."

"How is Jacob?" asked Ilia.

"Jacob? Jacob is going to die. He spoke of you. He looks yellow and coughs."

Terence was silent, and began munching with his lips, staring into a corner, sad and piteous.

Their life passed smoothly and monotonously; the days were as like each other as so many copper five-copeck pieces coined in the same year. A sullen anger hidden in the depths of Luneff's soul, like an enormous snake, devoured all the impressions of those days. Not one of his old acquaintances came to see him: Paul and Masha seemed to have found another path in life; Matitsa was knocked down by a horse and died in a hospital; Perfishka had as totally disappeared as if he were a hundred feet under the earth. Luneff intended going to see Jacob, but could not bring himself to do so, feeling that he had nothing to talk about with his dying friend. In the morning he read the papers, and in the day-time sat in the shop watching the yellow leaves torn from the trees and whirled down the street by the autumn wind. Sometimes a leaf blew into the shop.

"Most holy father Tihon pray to God for us," hummed Terence in a voice that rustled like the dead leaves, as he busied himself about the room.

One Sunday, on opening the paper, Ilia saw on the first page a piece of poetry—"Before and After"—signed by P. Gratchoff.

“In days of yore, like birds of woe,
My thoughts kept tearing at my heart ;
My life was blank and hope lay low,
Sorrow and torment were my part,”

wrote Paul. Luneff read his poetry, and his friend's mobile face, with its bright and daring eyes, which were by turns restless and sad and dismal, fixed on one thought, rose up before him. In his poetry Paul told how he had wandered about a strange town in tatters and in loneliness, and met with neither kindness nor welcome; and suddenly, when he was almost dying from hunger and weariness, he met some good people, who were kind to him, and he was “revived by a word, which was warm with love,” and fell upon his heart like a burning spark :—

“With hope my heart once more brimmed o'er
My thoughts glad songs into it pour.”

Luneff read it to the end and pushed the paper away angrily.

“Imagine, invent as much as you like! Wait a bit, those kind people of yours will show you what they're made of. Kind, indeed!” he smiled angrily; and suddenly a thought which seemed to have sprung up from quite a different heart entered his head.

“And suppose I was to go to them? I would go and say, I have come! Forgive me.”

“What for?” he asked himself instantly; and finished with a decided and gloomy,—

“They would send me away.”

Then he read the poetry again with anger and envy in his heart, and began to think of the girl.

“She is haughty. She'll just glance at you, and you'll have to go back the same way as you came.”

In the same paper, in the intelligence column, he read that on the 23rd of September in the court of justice of the district the case of Vera Kapitonova, accused of theft, would be tried. A bitter feeling blazed up in him, and, inwardly addressing himself to Paul, he said,—

"You can write poetry while she is in prison."

"Lord! be merciful unto me, a miserable sinner," whispered Terence, with a sigh, shaking his head sadly. Then he glanced at his nephew, who was rustling his newspaper, and called out,—

"Ilia!"

"Well?"

"Just imagine, Petruha."

And the hunchback smiled piteously and was silent.

"Well?" asked Luneff.

"He has robbed me," said Terence in a low, guilty voice, and gave a dismal kind of laugh.

Ilia looked at his uncle indifferently, and did not say a word, but thought,—

"It serves you right."

"Oh, dear, dear! He has swindled me."

"How much did you steal in all?" asked Ilia, calmly.

His uncle moved his chair away from the table, bent his head down, and, putting his hands on his knees, began moving his fingers, opening and shutting them.

"About ten thousand?" asked Luneff again.

The hunchback threw his head back and drawled in astonishment,—

"Te-en?"

Then, waving his hand at Ilia, he said,—

"What are you thinking of, the Lord be with you! There were only three thousand and a little over, all told, and you say ten. How you go!"

"Grandfather had more than ten thousand," said Ilia, with a mocking smile.

"You are not lying?"

"Why should I? He told me so himself."

"But did he know how to count?"

"Not worse than you and Petruha."

Terence grew thoughtful and bent his head down again.

"How much has Petruha kept back?" asked Ilia.

"About seven hundred," said Terence, with a sigh.

"So there was more than ten thousand?"

Luneff was silent. It was disagreeable to him to see his uncle's troubled and disappointed face.

"But, where was such a heap of money hidden away?" asked the hunchback, thoughtfully and in astonishment. "We seemed to have taken all. But perhaps Petruha swindled me then, eh?"

"You might be silent about it!" said Ilia, sternly.

"Yes, there's no good now speaking about it," agreed Terence, and gave a deep sigh.

Luneff fell to meditating over man's greediness and how many dirty actions people do for the sake of money; and he thought that if he had a lot of that same money, tens or hundreds of thousands, he would show people what he was made of. He would make people walk on all fours before him, he would. Carried away by a revengeful feeling and full of hate, he brought his fist down on the table and started with the blow; he glanced at his uncle and saw that the latter was looking at him with his mouth half-open and fear in his eyes.

"I was thinking," said he to Terence in a surly tone, getting up from the table.

"That happens sometimes," agreed the other, suspiciously.

When Ilia went into the shop the hunchback looked after him curiously and his lips moved noiselessly. Although Ilia did not see the suspicious look, he felt it at his back: he had noticed sometimes that his uncle followed his least movement, as if he were trying to understand something and was going to ask about it. This made Luneff evade all conversation with his uncle. Each day he felt more clearly that the hunchback was in his way, and the question: "How much longer would this continue?" constantly rose before him.

It was as if an abscess were breaking in his soul; life was getting more and more wearisome, and, what was worst of all, he did not feel the desire to do anything: nothing attracted him, and it seemed to him sometimes that he was slowly sinking each day lower and lower into a dark bottomless pit. Considering himself greatly wronged, he concentrated all his soul on the bitter sensation of this wrong, provoked it by constant thought, and found a justification in it for all the evil he had ever done. Soon after Terence's arrival, Tatiana Vlacieva

made her appearance, after an absence from town. At the sight of a humpbacked peasant in a brown fustian shirt, she compressed her lips with aversion and asked Ilia,—

“Is that your uncle?”

“Yes,” answered Luneff, shortly.

“Is he going to live with you?”

“Certainly.”

Tatiana Vlacieвна was conscious of something disagreeable and defiant in her partner's answer and did not pay any more attention to the hunchback, while Terence, standing at the door in Gavrik's place, twisted his yellow beard and looked curiously at the slight figure of the woman, clothed in grey. Luneff watched her, too, hopping about the shop like a sparrow, and waited in silence for her to ask something, ready to stun her with heavy insulting words. But glancing sideways at his savage, cold face, she did not ask anything. She stood behind the counter turning the pages of the book into which the daily gain was entered, and remarked how pleasant it was to pass a week or two in the country, how cheap it was and how much good it did you.

“There was a small river there, such a still one. And pleasant people—a telegraph clerk played the violin splendidly. I have learnt to row. But the peasant children! What a nuisance! They are just like gnats around you, wailing and begging: ‘Give me, give me.’ Their fathers and mothers teach them to do it—it is very unpleasant.”

“Nobody teaches them to,” said Ilia, drily. “Their fathers and mothers work; and the children are left without anybody to look after them. It is not true what you say.”

Tatiana Vlacieвна glanced at him in astonishment, opened her mouth, wishing to say something, but at that moment Terence smiled and said respectfully,—

“One sees gentlefolk but rarely in the country in our days. In former times gentlemen lived all their lives in the country, but now they go only on short visits.”

Mrs Avtonomoff looked first at him, then at Ilia, and

then stared into her book without saying a word. Terence was disconcerted and began pulling at his shirt. There was silence for a minute, and only the rustle of the pages and a rubbing sound—Terence rubbing his hump against the frame of the door—was to be heard.

"You there!" suddenly sounded Ilia's cold, calm voice, "before you speak to your superiors, ask for the permission to do so: 'allow me to speak,' you must say, 'do be so kind,' and go down on your knees."

The book escaped from Tatiana Vlacieva's hand and slid down the desk, but the woman caught it, bringing her hand down on it with a noise, and laughed. Terence bent his head and went out into the street. Then Tatiana Vlacieva glanced sideways at Ilia's surly face with a smile, and asked in a low voice,—

"Are you angry with me? What for?"

Her face had a sly look, and her eyes sparkled kindly and provokingly. Luneff stretched out his arm and took her by the shoulder. Hatred towards her and a wild, brutal desire to take her in his arms, press her against his breast and listen to the crunching of her thin bones, blazed up in him. He drew her towards him, showing his teeth, while she caught hold of his hand, and, trying to tear it off her shoulder, whispered,—

"Oh, let me go! It hurts! Are you mad? One can't embrace here! And—listen! It's inconvenient to keep your uncle; he is humpbacked; people will be afraid of him. Let me go, then! You must place him somewhere—do you hear?"

But he had got his arms round her and was bending his head down to her face with his eyes wide open.

"What are you thinking of? One cannot here—leave me!"

She suddenly dropped to the ground and slipped out of his arms as slippery as a fish. Luneff saw her through a hot mist that veiled his eyes, near the door. She was putting her jacket straight with trembling hands, and said,—

"Oh, dear, how rough you are! Can't you wait?"

His head was full of sound, as if streams were

running inside it. Motionless, with his fingers tightly interlaced, he stood behind the counter and looked at her, as if in her alone he saw all the evil and burden of his life.

"It is good to be passionate, but, darling, you must restrain yourself."

"Go away!" said Ilia.

"I am going. I cannot receive you to-day, but after to-morrow, the 23rd—my birthday—will you come?"

She spoke, feeling for her brooch with her fingers, and did not look at him.

"Go away!" he repeated, quivering with the desire to catch hold of her and torment her.

She went. Terence came in instantly and asked respectfully,—

"Is that—the partner?"

Luneff nodded his head and gave a sigh of relief.

"She's a grand lady! So that's what she's like. She's little, but—"

"Vile!" said Ilia in a husky voice.

"M-m," muttered Terence, suspiciously. Ilia felt his uncle's curious suspicious look, and asked coldly,—

"Well, what are you looking at?"

"I? Lord a mercy! Nothing."

"I know what I am saying. I said she was vile and that's the end of it. I could say worse and it would be the truth."

"A-oh? That's it, is it?" drawled the hunchback, condolingly.

"What?" cried Ilia, sternly.

"That means—"

"What does it mean?"

Terence stood before Ilia, frightened and hurt by his rough tones, and kept on transferring the weight of his body from foot to foot, his face was piteous and he blinked his eyes rapidly.

"That means—you know best," said he, after a silence.

"Is that all?" exclaimed Ilia. "I know them—clean outside."

"And I have had a chat with the dvornik," said the hunchback, soothingly, seating himself on a chair,

"about his brother. The justice of peace has sentenced him to seven days—yes! The dvornik says he was a meek, quiet and sober lad, says he. Suddenly this fit of madness seized him. He got drunk and began beating everybody—he smashed his master's face and the shopman's too. But before, they say, the master used to beat him and nothing happened—he always remained silent."

Luneff listened to his uncle's tale and thought,—

"I must throw up everything and go away. To the devil with a clean life! No life is possible for me. I'll throw up everything and go. I shall wander about, but here I should perish."

"He bore and bore it, but it burst through at last," said Terence.

"Who?"

"Ah. I was speaking of the dvornik's brother. The justice of peace has locked him up for seven days for fighting."

"Ah!"

"For seven days. I said, the man bore and bore it all well, and it accumulated in his soul, like soot in a chimney, and then it all blazed up, and burnt out in a flame."

"Uncle, stand at the counter! I am going out," said Luneff.

Terence's monotonous and sermonising voice sounded dismally in his ears, like church bells in Lent, and it was cold and crowded in the shop; but out in the street it was not joyous either. For several days it had rained. The grey clean flagstones looked fixedly and dismally at the dull sky above them, resembling human faces. The hollows between them were filled with mud, which made their cleanliness stand out more sharply. An oppressive dampness filled the air and the houses seemed heavy with moisture. The yellow leaves on the trees quivered in their death agony. Somewhere carpets and fur cloaks were being beaten out with rapid blows, the short sounds rang out and disappeared like stones in water. At the end of the street, right before Ilia's eyes, thick white and purple clouds rose up in the

sky, behind the roofs of the houses. They clambered up each other ponderously, higher and higher, changing their shape incessantly and resembling the smoke of a great fire, or mountains, or the troubled waters of a river. There a white cloud crawled out, and after it, but moving faster, rose a bluish one, which fell heavily on to the white cloud and covered it. They seemed to be rising into the grey heights for the sole purpose of falling down more heavily on to the houses, trees and earth. Luneff grew tired of looking at the living wall before him and returned to the shop, trembling with cold and weariness.

"I must throw it all up, the shop and everything. Uncle can do the business with Tanka, and I will go." He pictured to himself a field all wet with rain, the sky covered with grey clouds, a broad road with birch trees growing at the sides. He is walking along with a bundle at his back, his feet sink into the mud, a cold rain beats into his face; and in the field and on the road there is not a soul, not even any crows on the trees.

"I will hang myself," thought he to himself, indifferently, seeing that he had nowhere to go, and that he was not able to go anywhere.

CHAPTER XXXI

WAKING up in the morning two days later, he saw on his calendar the black figures of twenty-three and remembered that Vera was to be tried that day. He was glad of the possibility of leaving the shop, and felt a burning curiosity about the girl's fate. Dressing quickly and drinking his tea hastily, he started for the court of justice almost at a run, and arrived too early. No one was allowed to enter the building, a number of people were huddled together on the steps, waiting for the door to be opened. Luneff stopped near the door too, leaning his back against the wall of the building. A large square stretched before the court of justice, and in the middle of it stood a big church. Shadows moved along the pavement. The sun's disk, pale and tired, peeped out and disappeared again behind the clouds. Nearly every minute a shadow fell on to the square in the distance, crawled along the stones, climbed up the trees and seemed to be so heavy that the boughs of the trees rocked under its weight, then it enveloped the church from the foundation to the cross, clambered over it, moved noiselessly on towards the court of justice and the people at its doors.

Everyone looked dismal and had a hungry face, they looked at each other with tired eyes and spoke slowly. One man, with long hair, clad in a thin coat, buttoned up to the chin, and a bent hat, was twisting his pointed red beard with chilled fingers, and stamped his feet, in torn boots, impatiently on the ground. Another in a patched poddevka* and cap pulled over his eyes stood with his head bent low, with one hand in his pocket and the other thrust into his shirt. He

* Poddevka is a short coat which peasants wear.

seemed to be dozing. A little dark man in a pea-jacket and high boots, who resembled a beetle, seemed to be very anxious; he kept lifting his pale, sharp little face, and looked at the sky, whistled, knitted his brows, tried to catch his whiskers with his tongue and talked more than anyone else.

"Are they going to open?" exclaimed he, bending his head to one side and listening.

"No, h'm! But it's getting late. Have you been to the library, my boy?"

"No, it's too early," answered the long-haired man, pronouncing the words monotonously in one key.

"Devil, it's cold, d'you know!"

The long-haired man grunted feelingly, and said thoughtfully,—

"But where would we warm ourselves if there was no court of justice nor library?"

The dark one shrugged his shoulders in silence. Ilia observed these people and listened to what they were saying. He saw that they were "hooligans" or street thieves—people who live by dark deeds, write petitions and different papers for the peasants and dupe them, or else go to people's houses with letters, asking for help. Before, he was afraid of such people, but now they only aroused his curiosity.

"Why do such people live? And yet they live." A pair of pigeons alighted on the pavement not far from the steps. A fat pigeon with a hanging crop waddled awkwardly and began going round the other, cooing loudly.

"Phew!" the dark man whistled sharply. The man in the poddevka started and lifted his head. His face was swollen and blue, with glassy eyes.

"I can't bear pigeons," exclaimed the dark man, looking at the birds, which were flying away. "They are fat, like rich tradesmen, they coo—it makes me sick. Are you at law with anybody?" asked he of Ilia, suddenly.

"No."

"You are not the accused?"

"No."

The dark man looked Luneff over from head to heel, and said through his nose,—

“It is strange.”

“What is strange?” asked Ilia, with a smile.

“You have the face of one accused,” answered the man, volubly.

“Ah, they are opening.”

He darted first through the open door. Ilia, stung by his words, went after him and pushed the long-haired man with his shoulder in the doorway.

“Look where you’re going, churl,” said the long-haired man, calmly, and, pushing Ilia in return, got before him.

But this push gave Ilia no offence, it only astonished him.

“How queer!” thought he. “He pushes you as if he were some grand gentleman who expects to be the first everywhere, while he is only a street thief.”

In the judgment hall it was dark and quiet. A long table, covered with green cloth, arm-chairs with high backs, enormous, life-size portraits in gilt frames, crimson chairs for the jury, a big wooden bench behind a railing, everything was massive and inspired respect. The windows were deeply set in the grey walls, canvas curtains hung over the windows in heavy folds, and the window-panes were dim. The heavy doors opened noiselessly, and people in uniform walked about quickly and noiselessly too. Every object in this big room seemed mutely to inspire quiet and subdued behaviour. Luneff looked round, a feeling of awe made his heart contract, and when the official announced that “the court was entering,” he started and jumped to his feet before anyone else, although he did not know it was necessary to get up. One of the four men who entered the hall was Gromoff—the man who lived opposite Ilia’s shop. He sat down in the middle arm-chair, drew both his hands through his hair, and eased his collar, which was thickly embroidered with gold. His face reassured Ilia a little, it was just as ruddy and good-humoured as usual, he had only twisted the points of his moustache upward. To the right of him sat a

pleasant-looking little old man with a small grey beard and a snub nose and spectacles; and to the left, a bald man with a parted red beard and a yellow, expressionless face. Near the desk stood a young judge with a round head and closely-cropped hair and black goggle eyes. They were all silent for a time, looking through the papers on the table, while Luneff watched them with respect and waited for one of them to get up and announce in a loud voice something important.

But, suddenly turning his head to the left, Ilia saw the well-known, fat, shining as if it were polished, face of Petruha Filimonoff. Petruha sat in the front row of crimson chairs, leaning the back of his head against the back of his chair and calmly observing the public. Once or twice his glance fell on Ilia's face, and both times Ilia felt a desire to get up and say something to Petruha or Gromoff or to all the tribunal.

"He's a thief! he's beaten his son to death!"—blazed up in his head and he felt a burning sensation in his throat.

"Here, you are accused of—" Gromoff was saying in a gentle voice, but Ilia did not see to whom he was speaking; he was looking at Petruha's face overwhelmed by painful perplexity, and not able to reconcile himself to the fact that Filimonoff was judge.

"Tell me, prisoner at the bar," said the chief magistrate in a lazy voice, rubbing his forehead, "did you say to the shopman Anicimoff, 'Just you wait! I'll pay you back?'"

A casement window was flying to and fro with a squeak—

"Iu—iu—iu—"

Ilia saw two more faces he knew amongst the jury. Above Petruha and behind him sat a plasterer—contractor Silacheff—a big peasant man with long arms and a small, angry face, a friend of Filimonoff's, with whom he played draughts. People said that one day Silacheff quarrelled with one of his workmen at work and pushed him off the scaffolding, and the workman died from injuries received; while in the first row

next but one to Petruha sat Dodonoff, the owner of a large haberdashery shop. Ilia bought goods of him and knew that he was a cruel miserly man, who had on two occasions been bankrupt, when he paid at the rate of ten copecks for the rouble.

"Witness, when did you see that Anicimoff's cottage was on fire?"

"Iu—iu—iu," moaned the casement window, and something echoed the sound in Ilia's breast.

"Fool!" sounded a low whisper at his side. He looked round—by his side sat the little dark man with his lips screwed up disdainfully. "Fool!" repeated he, nodding to Ilia.

"Who is?" whispered Ilia, looking at him questioningly.

"The prisoner; he had a splendid opportunity of discomfiting the witness, but he lost it! I would have—oh?"

Ilia looked at the prisoner. He was a tall, bony peasant with an angular head. His face was dark and full of fear; he was showing his teeth, just as an exhausted dog, stupefied by beating, shows its teeth and cowers in a corner, surrounded by enemies against which it has not the strength to defend itself. His dark face wore an expression of utter animal fear. Petruha, Silacheff, Dodonoff and the others looked at him with calm, contented eyes; it seemed to Luneff that they were all saying to themselves,—

"He's caught, consequently he's guilty."

"It's dull!" whispered his neighbour. "The case is not at all interesting. The prisoner—is stupid, the procurator—is a laggard, the witnesses—are block-heads as usual. I'd have gobbled him up long ago."

"Is he guilty?" asked Luneff in a whisper, shuddering as if he had the ague.

"Not likely; but he can be condemned. He does not know how to defend himself. Peasants as a rule don't know how to defend themselves. They are good for nothing! They have bone and flesh, but of brain and wit they haven't the least morsel."

"That's true, y-yes."

"Have you twenty copecks?" asked the man, suddenly.

"Yes."

"Give them to me."

Ilia took out his purse and gave the coin before he had considered whether he ought to give it or not. But when he had given it he said to himself, looking sideways at his neighbour, with involuntary respect for him,—

"Cleverly done, that's the way people ought to live—pounce unawares upon your neighbour."

"He's a simple idiot, nothing less!" whispered the dark man again, indicating the prisoner with his eyes.

"Sh-sh-sh!" hissed the usher.

"Gentlemen of the jury!" said the public prosecutor, softly and impressively. "Look at the face of this man—it is more eloquent than the testimony of all the witnesses, who have established absolutely the guilt of the prisoner—eh, eh—it cannot do otherwise than convince us that before us stands a typical transgressor, an enemy to the social order and to the law."

The enemy to social order was sitting, but, probably he felt uncomfortable sitting when people said he was standing, so he got up slowly with his head bent low. His arms hung down helplessly by his sides and his whole long grey body was bent, as if he were ready to plunge into the jaws of justice.

Luneff bent his head too. He felt uneasy, and evil, uncomfortable thoughts stirred slowly and heavily in his head; he found no words to express them and they pressed upon him, engulfing each other. Petruha's red, restless face darted amongst his thoughts, like a moon amidst thunder-clouds.

When Gromoff announced an interval in the sitting, Ilia went out into the corridor, together with the dark man. The little man got out of the pocket of his pea-jacket a crumpled cigarette, and smoothing it out with his fingers, said,—

"The queer fellow! He swears 'I did not set fire to it,' says he. Swearing is of no good here, one must just bare one's back and be ready for the stroke—ha, ha!

The case is a grave one! A tradesman is outraged, it's of no importance whether it's you who is guilty or not! But it is important to punish someone for it—you are caught, and you will be punished."

"Is the peasant guilty in your opinion?" asked Luneff, thoughtfully.

"I suppose he is guilty, for he is stupid. Dexterous people are never guilty," snapped the man, with calm volubility, smoking his cigarette in a jaunty way. His eyes were dark and small, like those of a mouse, and his teeth, too, as small and sharp.

"Here, amongst the jury," said Ilia, with an effort, in a low voice, "are people—"

"Tradesmen mostly," the dark man corrected him, calmly. Ilia glanced at him and repeated,—

"Tradesmen. I know some of them."

"Aha!"

"Fine customers! that's to say, if one speaks the truth."

"Thieves too," suggested his interlocutor.

He spoke loudly, without any restraint. Throwing his cigarette away, he pursed up his mouth and whistled huskily, looking at everyone with bold, insolent eyes, and every part of him—each little bone—seemed to be quivering with hungry restlessness.

"Things like that happen sometimes. Generally speaking, justice is a light comedy, a tiny little comedy," said he, shrugging his shoulders. "Satisfied people exercise themselves in exterminating the vicious proclivities of hungry people. I assist at trials often, but have never seen a hungry man sit in judgment upon a satisfied man; and if a satisfied man judges a satisfied man, he does it for his greediness. 'Don't grab all,' says he, 'leave us some.'"

"They say a full man does not understand a hungry one," said Ilia.

"Nonsense!" replied his interlocutor. "He understands very well, that's why he is so severe."

"Well, if he is satisfied and honest, it's not so bad!" said Ilia in a low voice; "but when he's satisfied and a scoundrel, how can he judge a man?"

"Scoundrels are the most severe judges," said the

dark man, calmly. "Well, let's listen to this case about the robbery."

"She's an acquaintance of mine," said Luneff in a low voice.

"Ah!" exclaimed the man, glancing at him quickly. "Let's look at your acquaintance then."

Everything was confused in Ilia's head. He wanted to ask a great many things of this brisk little man, whose words showered down like peas out of a basket, but there was something disagreeable and dangerous in him which frightened Ilia. At the same time the persistent thought of Petruha as judge crushed all within him. This thought seemed to have entwined itself around his heart in an iron ring, and there was not enough space left for anything else.

When he approached the door of the judgment hall, he saw the back of Paul Gratchoff's head and his small ears in the crowd before him. He was glad, and pulled Paul by the sleeve of his coat, smiling into his face, and Paul smiled too—but unwillingly and with an apparent effort.

"Good-morning!"

"Good-morning!"

They stood in silence in front of each other for a few seconds, and both must have felt during those seconds something that made them begin speaking at the same time.

"Have you come to look?" asked Paul, smiling bitterly.

"And is she here?" asked Ilia, confusedly.

"Who?"

"Oh, your Sofia Nik."

"She is not mine," answered Paul, drily, interrupting him.

They entered the hall in silence.

"Let's sit together?" suggested Luneff.

Paul hesitated and answered,—

"You see I am with friends."

"Oh, all right."

"Here," said Paul, with animation, "listen to what the counsel for the defence will say."

"I'll listen," said Ilia in a low voice, and added still lower,—

"Well, good-bye, brother."

"Good-bye. We'll see each other again."

Gratchoff turned round and went away hastily. Ilia looked at him, feeling as if Paul had rubbed a sore on his body hard with his hand. A burning pain went through him, and he felt an envious and bitter feeling at seeing a good new coat on his friend's back and Paul's face healthier and clearer for these months. On the same seat with Paul sat Gavrik's sister. He said something to her and she turned her head quickly in Luneff's direction. Seeing her impetuously-advanced face, he turned his own aside, and his soul became still more thickly enveloped in dark feelings of injury, anger and perplexity. Thoughts started up impetuously and revolved in his head like a whirlwind, mixing themselves up, then suddenly stopped and disappeared; he felt an emptiness within him, while outside everything seemed to move in a dense line towards him, and he ceased to understand what was happening before him.

Meanwhile Vera was led in: she stood behind the railings in a grey gown, which reached down to her heels, and had a white handkerchief on her head. A golden lock of hair covered her left temple, her cheek was pale and her lips tightly compressed, while her eyes, wide open and motionless, looked gravely at Gromoff.

"Yes, yes, no, yes," sounded her voice dimly in Ilia's ears.

Gromoff was looking at her kindly and spoke to her in a low voice, softly, as if he were purring.

"Kapitanova! do you plead guilty of theft during the night?" crept towards Vera the unctuous inflections of his rich voice.

Luneff looked at Paul. He was sitting doubled up, with his head bent low down, and was pulling at his hat; while the girl at his side sat up straight and looked as if she were sitting in judgment upon them all—Vera, the judges and the public. She kept turning her head from side to side, her lips were pressed together disdainfully

and her proud eyes sparkled under her knitted brows coldly and sternly.

"I plead guilty," said Vera. Her voice quivered and its sound resembled the sound that a thin cup with a crack in it emits upon being rapped.

Two of the jury, Dodonoff and his neighbour, a red-haired, clean-shaven man, bent their heads together, moving their lips noiselessly and observing the girl with eyes that seemed to smile. Petruha Filimonoff thrust his body forward, holding on to his arm-chair; his face had grown still redder and his moustache moved. Many other members of the jury looked at Vera with the same particular attention, which Luneff understood, and which made him feel disgusted and indignant.

"They are judging her and yet they must needs gloat over her," thought he, clenching his teeth; and he wanted to cry out to Petruha,—

"You scoundrel! What are you thinking about? Where are you sitting? What ought you to do?"

Something rose in his throat and choked him, it seemed like a heavy ball, and hindered his breathing.

"Tell me, eh, Kapitanova," Gromoff was saying, moving his tongue lazily, with his eyes starting out of his head, like those of a sheep which is suffering from the heat, "how long have you been, eh—a prostitute?"

Vera drew her hand over her face, as if this question had stuck to her burning cheeks.

"A long time."

She answered firmly. A whisper passed through the listeners, which sounded like the crawl of snakes. Gratchoff bent down still lower, as if he wanted to hide himself, and kept pulling at his hat.

"How long?"

Vera was silent, looking into Gromoff's face with wide-open eyes gravely and sternly.

"A year? Two? Five?" persisted the chief magistrate. She kept silent, standing motionless, as if she were cut out of grey stone; only the ends of her handkerchief trembled on her breast.

"You have the right not to answer, if you like," said Gromoff, stroking his whiskers.

Then the barrister, a thin little man with a pointed beard and oval eyes, jumped up. His nose was thin and long and the back of his head was broad, making his face resemble an axe.

"Tell me, Kapitanova, what made you take up this livelihood?" asked he, sharply, in a ringing voice.

"Nothing made me," answered Vera, looking at her judges.

"M-m—that is not quite so. You see—I know—you told me."

"You don't know anything," said Vera. She turned her head towards him, and, looking at him sternly, continued angrily, with displeasure in her voice,—

"I did not tell you anything, you invented it all yourself."

Throwing a quick glance at the public, she turned towards the judges and asked, nodding her head at the counsel for the defence,—

"Will you allow me not to speak to him?"

Again the crawl of snakes was heard in the hall, this time louder and more distinctly.

Ilia was trembling with the strain and looked at Gratchoff. He expected something from him and waited with confidence; but Paul was looking over the shoulder of the man who sat in front of him, and was silent and motionless. Gromoff was smiling and saying something in oily, slippery words. Then Vera began speaking in a low but firm voice,—

"Simply—I wanted to grow rich, and took it, that is all. And there is nothing more, and I was always the same."

The jury began whispering to each other. Their faces had grown gloomy and displeasure appeared in the faces of the judges. Everything was quiet in the hall; the measured, dull thud of feet upon flagstones reached them from the street—soldiers were passing.

"In view of the prisoner pleading guilty, I should say—" the public prosecutor was saying.

Ilia felt that he could stay no longer. He got up and made a step forward.

"Silence!" said the usher, loudly.

Ilia sat down again with his head bent down low, like Paul. He could not bring himself to look at Petruha's red face, inflated with importance, as if it were offended; and at Gromoff's face with its unalterably benignant expression, he perceived behind the good-humour of the judge a cold heart, and saw that this joyous man was used to judging people, just as a carpenter gets used to planing wood; and an awed anxious thought arose in Ilia's heart—

"If I were to confess my guilt—I would be tried in the same way. Petruha would be judge, he would send me to Siberia, while he remained here himself."

This thought fixed itself in his mind, and he sat without looking at anyone and hearing nothing.

"I d-don't want you to speak about it," sounded Vera's trembling and offended cry, and she began to moan and shriek, catching at her throat with her hands, and pulling the handkerchief off her head. "I don't want it, I don't want it!"

The hall filled with a hubbub of sound. The girl's cries caused a commotion, and she threw herself about behind the railings as if she were being burnt, and sobbed fit to break her heart.

"Don't torment me—let me go—for Christ's sake!"

Ilia jumped up and dashed forward, but the people were moving towards him, and imperceptibly he found himself in the corridor.

"They bared her soul," he heard the dark man say.

Paul Gratchoff, pale and dishevelled, stood near the wall, and his jaw trembled. Ilia went up to him and looked into his face with gloomy, angry eyes. Around them people were standing and walking about, talking with animation, and there was a smell of tobacco.

"It means prison! You can cry as much as you like, it's all the same."

"She confessed, the little fool!"

"But it was *corpus delicti*?"

"She could have said he gave it to her."

Words flew about the corridor, like autumn flies, getting into Ilia's ears.

"Well?" asked he of Paul in a surly and angry tone, coming up to him.

Paul glanced at him, opened his mouth, but did not say a word.

"So you've ruined a fellow-being?" continued Luneff.

Paul started as if someone had struck him with a whip, lifted his hand, and, putting it on Luneff's shoulder, said in a piteous voice,—

"Was it I?"

Ilia shook his hand off his shoulder, and wanted to say to him,—

"Yes, it was you! You took care not to cry out that it was you for whom she committed the theft," but said instead, "Petruha Filimonoff judged her. Is that right, eh?" and smiled. And with the same smile on his face he went out into the street and walked along slowly, feeling as if he were tightly bound with invisible ropes. A weariness lay, like a heavy stone, on his breast; it made him feel cold and hindered him from thinking. Till evening he wandered aimlessly about from street to street, tired and hungry, like a stray dog. No desires entered his heart, and he noticed nothing until a sickness, caused by hunger, overtook him.

CHAPTER XXXI

It was dark. Lights appeared in the windows of the houses, and broad yellow streaks of light fell into the street, cut up by the shadows of flowers that stood on the window-sills. Luneff stopped, and, looking at the patterns made by the shadows, thought of the flowers in Gromoff's house, of his wife, who resembled a queen in a fairy tale, and of the sad songs that do not prevent one from laughing. A cat crossed the street with cautious steps, shaking its paws.

He went on, and, coming to the crossing, stopped again. One of the corner houses was brilliantly lighted up, and music sounded.

"I will go to an eating-house," decided Ilia, and went into the middle of the road.

"Take care," someone cried to him. The black nose of a horse appeared close to his face and sent a warm breath over it. He jumped aside, listened to the cabman swearing, and turned away from the eating-house.

"An isvoschik can't kill one," he thought calmly.

"I must have something to eat. But Vera will quite perish now."

His mind caught at the remembrance of the girl and began revolving mechanically around it. He felt, with a tiny particle of his soul, that he ought not to be thinking about Vera, but of himself, and yet had not the power of turning the current of his thoughts.

"She is proud too. She did not want to tell about Pashka, she saw there was nobody to tell about it. She is the best of all. Olimpiada would have. No, Olimpiada is good too—but Tanka, for instance." He suddenly remembered that it was Tatiana Vlacieva's birthday and that she had invited him. At first the idea of going to her seemed loathsome to him, but the

same instant he experienced a savage desire to act in despite of himself, and then one other acute, burning feeling woke up in his heart.

Hailing an *isvoschik*, he drove off, and in a few minutes found himself in the doorway of the dining-room at the *Avtonomoffs*, screwing up his eyes dazzled by the light and smiling dully at the people, who were sitting close to each other round the table in the large room.

"Ah! There you are!" exclaimed *Kirik*.

"How pale you are!" said *Tatiana Vlacievna*, observing *Ilia*.

"Have you brought any sweets? A birthday present, eh? Why, what were you thinking about?"

"Where have you been?" asked the hostess.

But *Kirik* caught him by the sleeve and led him round the table, introducing him to his guests. *Luneff* shook someone's warm hands, while all the faces of the guests melted together before his eyes into one long, cold and politely smiling face with big teeth. The smell of roast meat tickled his nostrils, the women's chatter sounded in his ears, like the sound of rain, and his eyes felt warm; a dull pain prevented him from moving them and a many-coloured haze seemed to float before them. When he sat down he became conscious that his feet were aching from fatigue and that hunger was gnawing at his entrails. He silently took a piece of bread and began eating. One of the guests gave a loud guffaw and the same instant *Tatiana Vlacievna* said to him,—

"So you do not wish to congratulate me? You are nice to come in, sit down and eat without saying a word." Under the table she gave his foot a hard push with her own foot and bent her head over the tea-pot refilling it. Through the sound of the running water, *Ilia* heard her low whisper,—

"Behave decently."

He put his piece of bread down on the table, rubbed his hands and said loudly,—

"I have passed the whole day in the court of justice."

His voice sounded above the hubbub of talk. The guests became silent. Luneff grew confused, feeling their eyes upon him, and glanced round at them from under his brows. They were looking at him suspiciously, as if they all doubted whether this broad-shouldered, curly-headed lad could say anything interesting. An awkward silence filled the room. Fragments of thoughts whirled in Ilia's head, disjointed and dull, and then suddenly they all seemed to sink down somewhere and disappeared in the darkness of his soul.

"Sometimes trials are very interesting," remarked Felitsata Egorovna Grislova in a sour voice, and, taking up the box of sweets, began rummaging about in it with the pincers.

Two red spots appeared on Tatiana Vlacievná's cheeks, while Kirik blew his nose noisily and said,—

"Well, brother, why don't you finish what you were saying? So you were at a trial."

"I am making them feel uncomfortable," guessed Ilia, and his lips parted slowly in a smile. The guests began talking all together again.

"Once I went to the trial of a case of murder," said a young telegraph clerk, pale and black-eyed, with small whiskers.

"I like to read and hear about murders awfully!" exclaimed Mrs Travkin. While her husband looked round, and said,—

"Open trials are a salutary institution."

"It was a friend of mine, Eugeniev, who was tried. He was standing on guard by the money safe one day, and got to joking with a boy, and all of a sudden shot him."

"Oh, how dreadful!" exclaimed Tatiana Vlacievná.

"He was killed on the spot," added the telegraph clerk, with a kind of pleasure.

"And I was witness in a case once," said Travkin in his noisy, dry voice, "while in another case a man was tried who had committed twenty-three robberies. Not bad that?"

Kirik burst into a loud laugh. The guests divided themselves into two groups; one listened to the

telegraph clerk's tale about the murder of the boy, and the other to Travkin's uninteresting communication about the man who had committed twenty-three robberies. Ilia kept his eye on the hostess, feeling as if a fire were beginning to blaze up slowly within him; as yet it gave no light, but only burnt into his heart steadily. From the minute that Luneff saw that the Avtonomoffs were afraid he would put them out of countenance before their guests, his thoughts grew more orderly, as if he had found something which united them. Tatiana Vlacieвна was bustling about in the next room near a table covered with bottles. Her crimson silk blouse stood out sharply against the background of white wall-paper in a bright blot, and the small woman, tightly laced in her corset, fluttered about the room like a butterfly, and the pride of a thrifty housewife, who has everything going well, shone in her face. Once or twice Ilia saw that she beckoned to him with scarcely perceptible signs, but he did not go up to her, and felt a pleasure from the consciousness that this troubled her.

"What are you sitting like an owl for, brother?" asked Kirik, suddenly turning to him. "Say something—do not stand on ceremony. Everybody here is well brought up, they will not be exacting in case of anything."

"They sat in judgment to-day," began Ilia at once in a loud voice, "upon a girl I knew—she walks the streets, but she is a good girl."

Again he turned everybody's attention towards himself, and again all the guests stared at him. A broad and mocking smile revealed Felitsata Egorovna's big teeth; the telegraph clerk began twirling his moustache, hiding his mouth with his hand, everyone was trying to seem grave and to be listening attentively. The clatter of some knives and forks, which Tatiana Vlacieвна had suddenly let drop, resounded in Ilia's heart like a war signal. He looked round at all the faces calmly with his eyes wide open, and continued,—

"Why do you smile? Amongst them are very good girls."

"That's most likely," interrupted Kirik; "but take care, don't be too talkative upon the subject."

"You are all well brought up," said Ilia. "If I make a slip of the tongue you will not be too exacting."

A whole sheaf of bright sparks seemed to blaze up suddenly within him. He smiled sarcastically and his heart was moved to rapture by the bright sparkle of words which arose suddenly in his mind

"The girl stole some money from a merchant."

"It's getting from bad to worse," exclaimed Kirik, screwing up his face comically and shaking his head despondently.

"You understand how and when she could have stolen it, but perhaps she did not steal it, and it was given to her as a present."

"Tanichka," cried Kirik. "Come here. Ilia is giving us such stories."

But Tatiana Vlacieva was already at Ilia's side; smiling constrainedly, she said, shrugging her shoulders,—

"What is there so wonderful? It's very usual, you know hundreds of stories like that—there are no young ladies here. But—leave it for afterwards, and for the present, ladies and gentlemen, please partake of something."

"Please pass into the next room," cried Kirik. "And I will take a bite of something too—he, he!"

Everyone turned away from Ilia, he saw that the guests did not desire to listen to him because the host and hostess did not wish it, and this provoked him still more. Getting up from the table, he continued, addressing himself to everybody,—

"And then this girl was tried by people who, most probably, had made use of her themselves many times; some of them are known to me. And the name of scoundrel is too mild for them."

"Allow me," said Travkin, sternly, lifting up his finger. "You should not speak so. They are members of the jury, and I myself—"

"The jury, exactly," exclaimed Ilia. "But can they be just, if—"

"Allow me. The jury is, so to say, a great reform,

which was introduced for the universal welfare by Alexander II. How dare you abuse an institution of the State?"

He snorted in Ilia's face, and his fat shaven cheeks quivered, while he rolled his eyes from right to left. Everyone crowded round them in a circle, some standing in the doorway, seized by a pleasant foreboding of a row. Felitsata Egorovna looked down upon the hostess condescendingly, while she, pale and anxious, pulled at her guests' sleeves, saying hurriedly,—

"Dear me, ladies and gentlemen, let us drop the subject. Really, it is not interesting. Kirik, ask them—do?"

Kirik blinked his eyes in a confused way and said,—

"Please! to the deuce with forms, reforms and all that philosophy."

"It is not philosophy, but politics," gasped Travkin; "and people who speak in that way are called politically unsound."

A burning whirlwind caught Ilia up. It was good to stand in front of the stout little man, with his moist lips and his shaven face, and see him getting full of wrath. The knowledge that the Avtonomoffs were put out of countenance before their guests gladdened him greatly. He grew cooler and cooler; the desire to brave all these people, to say insolent words to them and make them mad with fury, this desire was unwinding in him like a steel spring, and lifting him up into pleasant but dreadful heights. He became still calmer and his voice sounded firmer,—

"You can call me whatever you like, you are an educated man, but I will not go back from my words. Does a full man understand a hungry one? Let the hungry one be a thief, but the full one is a thief too."

"Kirik Nikodimich!" gasped Travkin. "I—what is this? This is—"

But at that moment Tatiana Vlacieva gave him her arm, and, carrying off the indignant man, began saying to him in a loud voice,—

"Your favourite sandwiches—with herring, hard-boiled eggs and green onion, rubbed small with fresh butter."

"N-yes! I know!" exclaimed Travkin in an offended way, smacking his lips loudly. His wife looked at Ilia crushingly, and, taking her husband by the other arm, said,—

"Don't get excited over trifles, Anton."

While Tatiana Vlacieвна continued soothing her guest,—

"Pickled sterlets with tomatoes."

"It is not nice of you, young man!" said Travkin, reproachfully but magnanimously, suddenly turning his head towards Ilia and stopping. "You ought to appreciate things and understand them—yes!"

"I don't understand!" exclaimed Ilia. "That is why I speak. Why is Petruha Filimonoff entrusted with the right to dispose of other people's lives?"

The guests went past Ilia without looking at him, and trying not to touch him with their clothes; while Kirik went up close to him and said roughly in an offended way,—

"The devil take you! you're a blockhead, and nothing else!"

Ilia started and darkness grew before his eyes, as if someone had given him a blow on the head, and, clenching his fists, he made a step towards Avtonomoff; but Kirik turned away quickly, without noticing his movement, and went up to the table on which the side dishes stood. Ilia heaved a deep sigh.

Standing in the doorway, he saw the backs of the people, who were crowding round the table, and heard them munching. Their cheek bones moved. The crimson blouse of the hostess seemed to give a dim red colour to everything around Ilia, and made his sight grow troubled.

"M-m!" mumbled Travkin. "This is wonderfully good—wonderfully!"

"Would you like some pepper?" asked the hostess in a tender voice.

"I'll give you some pepper!" decided Ilia, with cold-blooded wrath. The steel spring had unwound within him, he threw his head back and in two strides came up to the table. Catching hold of someone's glass of

red wine, he held it out to Tatiana Vlacieвна and said distinctly, as if he wanted to kill her with his words,—

“Let’s have a drink, Tanka!”

These words acted upon everyone as if something had fallen with a deafening crash and extinguished the light in the room; everyone was suddenly enveloped in darkness and remained transfixed in this darkness in the position in which he was overtaken. Open mouths with pieces of food in them looked like suppurating wounds on these people’s frightened and perplexed faces.

“Well, let’s have a drink! Kirik Nikodimich, tell my mistress to drink with me! To drink without any ceremony. What does it matter? Why should we keep our filth to ourselves? let’s show it in public! Here, I have decided to do so.”

“Scoundrel!” cried the woman, piercingly, in a shrill voice.

Ilia saw her lift her arm and with his fist warded off the plate she threw at him. The crash of the broken ware seemed to stun the guests still more. Slowly and noiselessly they moved aside, leaving Ilia face to face with Avtonomoff. Kirik held a small fish by the tail, blinking his eyes, pale, pitiful and dazed.

Tatiana Vlacieвна was trembling, threatening Ilia with her fists; her face had grown the same colour as her blouse, and her tongue articulated with difficulty.

“Y-you are lying—lying,” hissed she, stretching out her neck towards Ilia.

“And would you like me to say what you’re like naked?” asked Ilia, calmly. “You showed me all your little moles yourself. Your husband will know if I am lying or not.”

Someone’s suppressed laugh and a low exclamation was heard. Mrs Avtonomoff tossed up her arms, caught herself by the neck and dropped on to a chair without a sound.

“The police!” cried the telegraph clerk. Kirik turned towards him, and, suddenly lowering his head, went at Luneff like a bull.

Ilia put out his hand, gave Kirik's head a push, and said sternly,—

"Where are you going? You're a corpulent man. I'll give you a blow and you'll fall. Just listen to me; and all of you, too. Listen—you'll never hear the truth elsewhere."

But, staggering back from Ilia, Kirik again lowered his head and went at him. The guests looked on in silence. No one stirred, only Travkin went into a corner on tip-toe, sat down on the low stove, and, putting the palms of his hands together, thrust them between his knees.

"Take care, I'll give you a blow!" warned Ilia in a surly tone. "I have nothing against you to injure you for! You are stupid, and harmless. I have not received any evil from you—keep away!"

He pushed him away and went up to the wall himself. Leaning his back against it, he continued, looking at everyone,—

"Your wife flung herself at me. She's a clever one. There is no woman baser than she is! But you are all dastards too. I was in court to-day, and have learnt how to judge."

He wanted to say so much that he could not master all his thoughts, and flung them as if they were fragments of stone.

"I'm not accusing Tanka, it happened by chance, of its own accord, everything has happened of its own accord all my life long. I even strangled a man by accident. I did not intend to, but strangled him nevertheless. Tanka! we set up our business with the very same money that I took from the man I had murdered."

"He is mad!" cried Kirik, joyously, and, dancing about the room from one guest to another, cried out, full of trouble and joy,—

"Do you see? Do you hear? He has gone mad Oh, Ilia—dear, oh, dear! Oh! I am sorry, brother!"

Ilia burst into a loud laugh. He felt still calmer and more at ease after his confession of the murder. He stood there and did not seem to feel the floor

under his feet, as if he were standing on air, and it seemed to him that he was rising up higher and higher.

Robust and strong, he thrust his chest forward and threw back his head; his curly hair covered his large, pale forehead and temples, and his eyes had a mocking and savage expression.

Tatiana rose and went up to Felitsata Egorovna with faltering steps and said in a quivering voice,—

“I saw for some time; he has been like that some time—with wild eyes, and fearful.”

“If he has gone mad the police must be called in,” said Felitsata, impressively, looking attentively at Luneff’s face.

“He is mad, he is mad!” cried Kirik.

“He will beat us all next,” whispered Grisloff, looking round anxiously. They were all afraid to leave the room.

Luneff stood by the door and they had to pass him. He kept on laughing. He felt a pleasure in seeing that all these people were afraid of him, and watching them, he noticed that none of the guests felt any compassion for the Avtonomoffs, but would have listened to him deriding his mistress the whole night with pleasure, if it had not been for their fear.

“I am not mad,” said he, knitting his brows sternly, “but stop, stand still. I won’t let you go away, and if you throw yourselves upon me, I’ll beat you to death, I am strong.”

Putting out his long arm, with its heavy fist, he shook it in the air and then dropped it.

“Tell me what kind of men are you? Why do you live? Strugglers for crumbs—rabble!”

“You there!” cried Kirik. “Hold your tongue!”

“Hold your tongue yourself! But I shall speak. Here, a nice sight you are to be sure, eating and drinking, cheating each other, not loving anyone—what more do you want? I looked for a decent life, a clean one, it does not exist anywhere! I have only become bad myself. A good man can’t live with you—he’ll rot. Good people you torment to death. I, here, am a vicious man, but amongst you all I’m like a helpless cat

amid thousands of rats in a dark cellar. You are everywhere, you think yourselves competent judges of everything, and lay down the law about everything. But nevertheless you're nothing but vermin. You have devoured me and rotted me between you."

He suddenly felt sad.

"And what shall I do next?" he asked himself; and, bending his head down he fell into deep thought. The same instant the telegraph clerk pushed himself away from the wall like a ball, and dashed out of the room, slipping past Luneff.

"Oh! I have let one go!" said Luneff, lifting his head.

"I'll go for the police!" cried the telegraph clerk.

"Well, call them in! It's all the same," said Ilia.

Tatiana Vlacieвна went past him, staggering like one in a dream, and without looking at him.

"I've hurt her!" continued Luneff, nodding his head at her with a smirk. "She deserves it—the vermin!"

"Hold your tongue!" cried Avtonomoff out of the corner. He was kneeling down and rummaging about in some box.

"Don't shout, little fool!" answered Ilia, sitting down on a chair and crossing his arms on his breast. "What are you shouting out for? I lived with her, I know her. And I murdered a man, the merchant Poluek-toff. Do you remember, I spoke to you about Poluek-toff several times? That was because I strangled him. And, by God! the shop was opened with his money."

Ilia looked round the room. Along the wall there stood silently a crowd of frightened, pitiful people. He felt that he was tired of speaking, and a feeling of emptiness and apathy filled his breast, and above the void, as the dimmed rays of the moon in an autumn sky, there rose the question,—

"And what next?"

Listening to his own words, he said,—

"Do you think I am confessing my sins to you? Just catch me! I am laughing at you, that's what I am doing."

Kirik sprang out of his corner, red and dishevelled. He flourished a revolver, and, rolling his eyes wildly, cried,—

“Now you won’t escape. Aha-a! You murdered him, did you?”

The women gasped. Travkin, who was sitting on the low stove, and dangling his legs, gasped out,—

“Gentlemen, I cannot stand it any longer. Let me go. This is your private business.”

But Avtonomoff did not hear him. He danced before Ilia, thrusting his revolver at him, and shouted,—

“To Siberia, we’ll show you.”

“But your pistol isn’t even loaded, I expect?” said Ilia, indifferently, looking at him with tired eyes. “What are you storming about for? I am not going anywhere. I have nowhere to go to. You threaten me with Siberia? Well, if it must be Siberia, let it be so.”

“Anton, Anton,” sounded the loud whisper of Travkin’s wife, “come.”

“I can’t, mother.”

She took him by the arm. Side by side, they went past Ilia with bent heads. Tatiana Vlacieva was sobbing in the next room, shrieking and gasping, while in Luneff’s breast the sensation of dark and cold emptiness kept growing.

“And now my life is broken off,” he said thoughtfully in a low voice. “And there’s nothing to feel sorry about. Who shattered it?”

Avtonomoff stood in front of him and cried triumphantly,—

“You won’t move us to pity.”

“I’m not trying to, the devil take you all! You can only feel sorry for a five-copeck coin when it falls past your pocket. And I too. I’d sooner feel sorry for a dog than for you. It’s a pity I had to live with human beings instead of dogs. Well, why do not the police come? I feel dull. Kirik, you had better move away, for I feel sick at the sight of you.”

And he really did feel disgusted and sick sitting opposite to Avtonomoff. The guests went out of the room—they crawled cautiously out, looking at Ilia

apprehensively. He only saw grey blots floating past him, and they awakened neither thoughts nor feelings in him. The emptiness within him grew and engulfed everything else. He stopped for a minute, listening to Avtonomoff's cries, and suddenly said, with a smile,—

"Let's wrestle, Kirik?"

"I'll send a bullet through your head!" roared Kirik.

"But you have no bullet!" replied Luneff, with a sneer, and added with conviction,—

"With what pleasure I would have plumped you down!"

After this he did not say anything more, but sat in silence and waited.

At last two policemen and a police officer arrived. Luneff started at the sight of them and got up.

Tatiana Vlacieвна appeared behind them, and, stretching out her arm towards Ilia, said in a choking voice,—

"He confessed to us that it was he who murdered Poluektoff, the money-changer—you remember?"

"Can you confirm it?" asked the police officer, quickly.

"Why not? I may as well confirm it," answered Luneff, calmly, in a tired way. "Good-bye, Tanka, don't trouble, don't be afraid—but, by the way, go to the devil all of you!"

The police officer sat down at the table and began writing something, the policemen stationed themselves on both sides of Luneff; he looked at them, and, sighing heavily, bent his head. Stillness reigned, only the scratching of the pen on the paper was heard, while outside the night set up walls of impenetrable darkness. Kirik stood at one of the windows, looking out into the darkness; suddenly he threw his revolver into the corner and said to the police officer,—

"Savelieff! Give him a beating and let him go—he is mad."

The police officer looked at Kirik, pondered for a minute, and said,—

"It's impossible—after such a statement; the assistant knows about it."

"Oh, dear," sighed Avtonomoff.

"How kind you are, Kirik Nikodimich," said Ilia, shaking his head. "There are dogs who, when they're beaten, yet fawn upon their masters. But perhaps it is not compassion that moves you, but fear that I will tell about your wife at the trial? Never fear, that won't happen. I am ashamed to think of her, let alone speak about her."

Avtonomoff went hastily into the next room and sat down noisily on a chair.

"Well," said the police officer, addressing Ilia, "can you sign the paper?"

"Yes."

He took the pen, and, without reading the paper, wrote in big letters: ILIA LUNEFF; and when he lifted his head he saw that the police officer was looking at him in astonishment. For several seconds they observed each other in silence, one interested and displeased with something, the other indifferent and calm.

"Did your conscience bring you to this?" asked the police officer in a low voice.

"I have no conscience," answered Ilia, firmly.

They were silent. Then Kirik's voice reached them from out of the next room,—

"He is mad!"

"Come along," said the police officer, shrugging his shoulders. "I won't bind your hands, only you must not try to escape. The lock-up is not far from here, at the bottom of the hill."

"Where can I escape to?" asked Ilia, shortly.

"Well, I don't know. Swear that you won't run away—by God!"

Luneff looked at the wrinkled, pitying face of the police officer, and said in a surly tone,—

"I don't believe in God."

The police officer waved his hand.

"March!"

When the obscurity and dampness of the night enveloped Luneff, he gave a deep sigh, stopped and looked

up at the sky, which was almost black and seemed as if it were quite close to the earth, resembling the smoky ceiling of a small, close room.

"Go on," the policeman said to him.

He went on. The houses stood on each side of the road and looked like enormous stones, the mud emitted a sobbing sound under their feet, and the road led down to where the blackness seemed still denser. Ilia stumbled against a stone and almost fell. In the emptiness of his soul the troublesome thought started up,—

"And what next?"

And instantly before him rose the picture of the trial. Gromoff's gentle voice and Petruha Filimonoff's red face.

His toes ached from the blow against the stone. He went slower. In his ears sounded the bold words of the little dark man about satisfied people,—

"They understand quite well; that is why they are severe."

Then he heard Gromoff's good-humoured voice,—

"Do you plead guilty?"

And the public prosecutor saying slowly,—

"Tell us, prisoner."

Petruha's red face was frowning and his red lips moved.

Luneff limped along and went still slower.

"Go on, go on!" said the policeman, sternly.

An inexpressible distress, burning like red-hot iron and as sharp as the blade of a knife, cut into Ilia's heart. He dashed forward and ran down the hill at the top of his speed, pushing himself from the stones with his feet. The wind whistled in his ears, he was suffocating, waving his hands and throwing his body on further and further into the darkness. Behind him the policeman came thumping along heavily, shrill whistles of alarm cut the air, and a husky voice roared,—

"Ho-old him!"

Everything aroused Ilia—the houses, street, sky, seemed to be quivering and leaping and clambering after him in a thick, heavy mass. He tore on and felt

no fatigue, for his desire not to see Petruha had given him wings. Something grey and smooth, that filled him with despair, rose up before him from out of the darkness. He remembered that the street turned into the High Street almost at a right angle. There were people there and he would be caught.

"Fly on, my soul!" cried he at the top of his voice, and, bending his head, dashed forward still quicker. A cold, grey stone wall rose up before him. A blow, which sounded like the splash of a wave on the river, resounded in the darkness of the night, hollow and short, then died away.

Then two figures came rolling along towards the wall. They flung themselves upon the third, who had fallen at the bottom of it, but hastily rose again. Some more people came running down the hill, the thud of their feet, shouts and shrill whistles resounded in the air.

"Has he smashed himself?" asked one of the policemen, gasping for breath.

The other struck a match and sat down on the ground. At his feet lay a hand, and the fingers, tightly clenched, were slowly relaxing.

"His head seems to have burst."

"Look, there's the brain."

The black figures of people leaped out of the darkness.

"Oh, you devil!" said the policeman, who was standing by, in a low voice. His companion rose from the ground, and, crossing himself, said in a tired, choking voice,—

"Lord, rest his soul, all the same."

THE END

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